CD INSIDE

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TEACH YOURSELF

BLUES HARMONICA

10 EASY LESSONS

Specifically designed for students who wish to play Blues Harmonica, either in a group or for fun. The emphasis is on making music immediately. Includes note bending, train whistle and rhythm sounds, vibrato and improvisation.

PETER GELLING

Introduction

10 Easy Lessons for Blues Harmonica is specifically designed for students who wish to play Blues harmonica, either in a Group or solo for fun. The emphasis is on making music immediately. The exercises sound great as well as teaching the necessary notes and techniques. Each lesson introduces new topics building on what you have learnt. The lessons are graded so that your knowledge and technique will develop simultaneously. **All harmonica players should know all of the information contained in this book.**

Starting with basic note values and the fundamentals of **cross harp** playing, this book moves through a variety of sounds, rhythms and techniques in a progressive manner. All the essential sounds and techniques of harmonica playing are presented along with the basics of music as they apply to the harmonica. The book contains lessons on note bending, train whistle and rhythm sounds, vibrato, swing rhythms third position playing and improvisation along with lots of great sounding riffs and solos. Anyone who completes this book will be well on the way to being an excellent Blues harp player.

The best and fastest way to learn is to use this book in conjunction with:

1. Practicing and playing with other musicians. You will be surprised how good a basic harmonica/guitar or harmonica/piano combination can sound even when playing easy music.
2. Learning by listening to your favourite CDs.

To improve your skills even further it is recommended that you use a metronome or drum machine with all the examples in the book. It would also be helpful to play along with the recording that accompanies the book. If you are serious about music, a good teacher can often help you progress much quicker than you can on your own.

Keep practicing, keep playing and have fun.

Using the Compact Disc

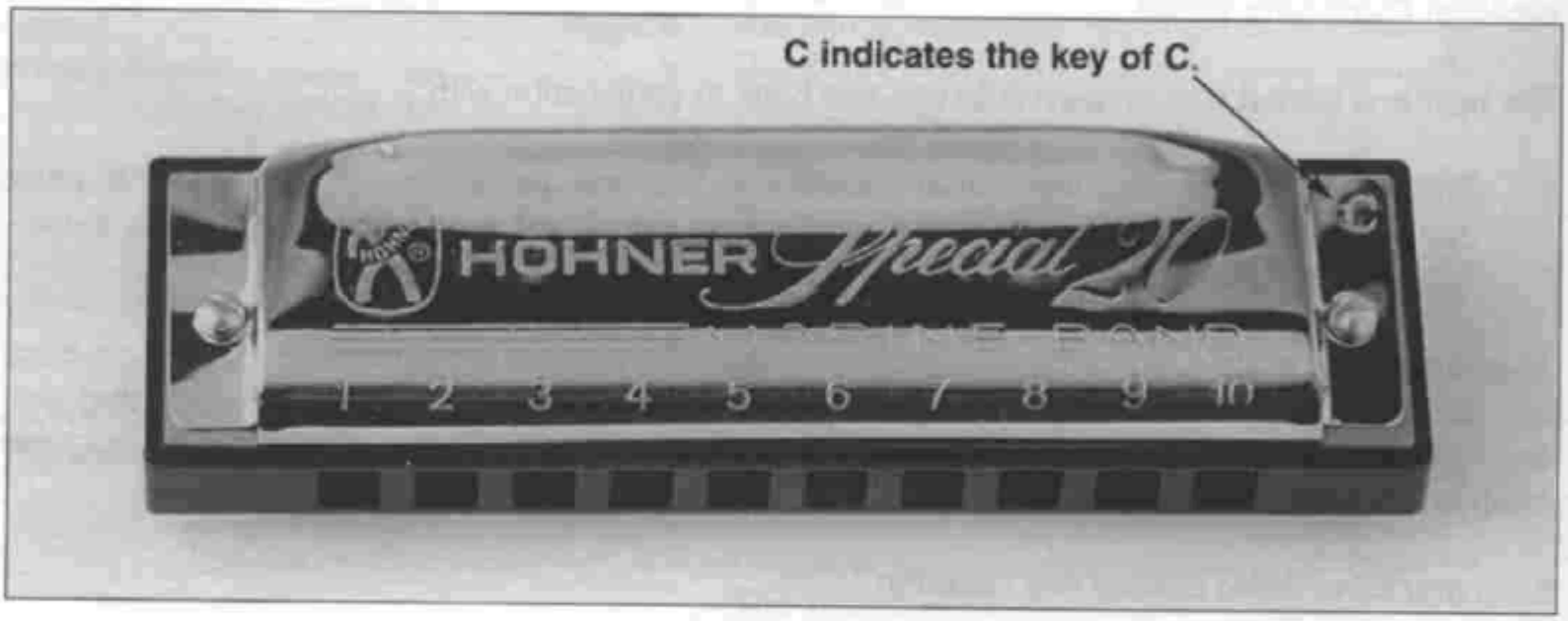
It is recommended that you have a copy of the accompanying compact disc that includes all the examples in this book. The book shows you which holes on the harmonica to play and what technique to use and the recording lets you hear how each example should sound. Practice the examples slowly at first, gradually increasing tempo. Once you are confident you can play the example evenly without losing the beat, try playing along with the recording. You will hear a drum beat at the beginning of each example, to lead you into the example and to help you keep time. A small diagram of a compact disc with a number as shown below indicates a recorded example. Some of the tracks on the CD contain more than one example. In these cases, index points have been used (1.0, 1.1, 1.2 etc). If your CD player has an index points function, you can select each example individually. If not, each example will automatically follow the previous one.

1.0 ← CD Track Number

1.1 ← CD Track Number

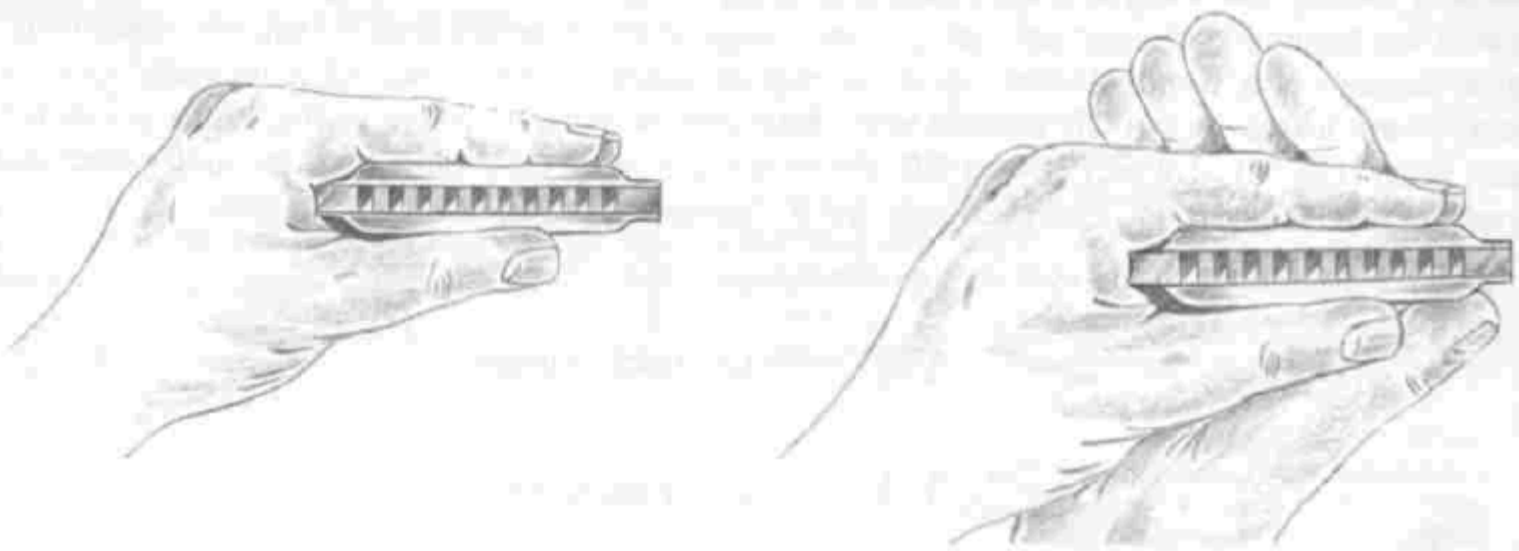
Which Harmonica to Use

This book is designed to be used with the **diatonic ten hole harmonica,** which is the most common type of harmonica. It is also the best type for bending notes and several other techniques essential to Blues playing. There are many different brands of diatonic harmonica available. Some of my personal favorites are the **Hohner marine band** or **special 20** models, and the **Lee Oskar** by **Tombo**. A common variation in types of ten hole harmonica is that the body of the instrument may be made of either wood or plastic. Although some players prefer the wooden body, the plastic version is more practical because it can be washed without any swelling of the body. When the wood swells, the edges of each block can become rough and can cut your mouth. With plastic, this does not happen.The CD which accompanies this book has been recorded with a **C harmonica**. This means that a harmonica with a **C** written on it (as shown below) is tuned to the key of C. The word "key" means the central note to which all others relate. There are twelve different keys used in music and each one begins on a different pitch. To play along with the CD you will need a C harmonica, so make sure your harmonica has a C written somewhere on it.



How to Hold the Harmonica

The best way to hold the harmonica is shown below, using the **left hand**, with the low numbered end of the harmonica held gently between your thumb and forefinger. The numbers on the harmonica should be facing upward. This hand position will prepare you to use the sound effect known as the **hand vibrato** or **wah wah**, which is introduced in lesson 4. It can be used by right or left-handed players alike. Keep the four fingers of the left hand straight, and pressed gently but closely together, with no visible gaps between them.

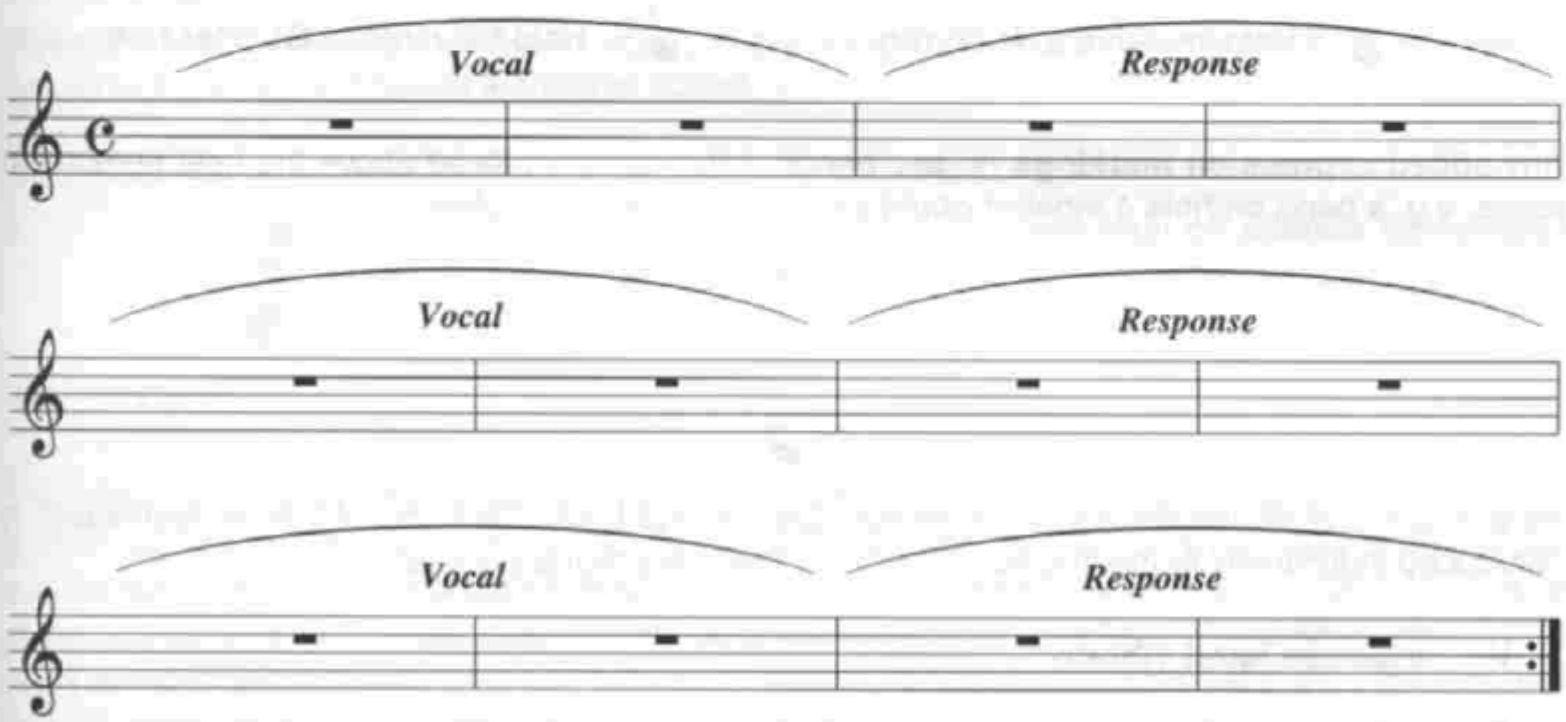


Lesson 1

12 Bar Blues

The **12 bar Blues** is a pattern of chords which repeats every 12 bars. It is the most common progression in Blues music, and is used extensively in Rock and Jazz as well. If you can think of the sound of any Blues song you have heard, it is very likely to use the 12 bar format. In Blues, many songs have a vocal line which is sung in the first four bars and then repeated in the second four bars (bars 5 to 8). This is usually followed by a new vocal line which is sung in the final four bars of the progression (bars 9 to 12). The vocal lines fit into these bars in the progression but usually do not take up the whole four bars of each line. In a situation where the vocalist is accompanied by other musicians, one of the instruments (e.g. harmonica) plays fills in between the vocal lines. In this situation the vocal line usually lasts approximately two bars and the fill played by the instrumentalist finishes in the next two bars to allow for the next vocal line. This is called **call and response** and is a central element in Blues music. A typical example of call and response is given below. Listen to the CD to hear the effect it produces. You will probably recognise it right away. You are not expected to reproduce the harmonica part at this stage, this example is purely for listening, although by the time you finish the book you will be able to play all of the sounds you hear in this example.

1. 12 Bar Blues in the Key of G



Another important aspect of this first example is that it demonstrates the role a harmonica often plays when accompanying a vocalist rather than playing a solo. Of course, when you play a solo you can play in every one of the 12 bars of the progression, but when playing with a vocalist it is important not to play over the top of what they are singing. Traditionally many of the great Blues harmonica players (e.g. Sonny Boy Williamson, Little Walter, Junior Wells) have also been vocalists, so they never have this problem. If you are not the vocalist, it is important to remember the **use of silence** right from the beginning. Vocalists and other musicians get very annoyed with harp players who play over the top of everybody, and besides this the audience always wants to hear the words of the song.

Reading the Notation System

This book uses a unique harmonica notation system which gives you specific information about which holes to play to get the correct sounds and how long to hold each note for. The system is made up of a combination of numbers corresponding to the holes on the harmonica, and rhythm notation which is closely related to standard musical notation.

The holes on the harmonica are represented by **two types of numbers**.

Outlined numbers indicate notes played with an **inhaled breath**, e.g. 2 indicates the second hole on the harmonica inhaled.

Solid numbers indicate notes played with an **exhaled breath**, e.g. **2** indicates the second hole on the harmonica exhaled.

Chords are indicated by numbers stacked vertically one on top of the other, e.g. 3 2 1 indicates that holes 1, 2 and 3 are played **simultaneously** with an inhale breath.

The length of time a note or chord should sound is indicated by standard musical notes placed under the hole numbers, as shown below.

5 Hole 5 exhaled

Held for value of **Half note**

6 Hole 6 inhaled

Held for value of **Quarter note**

Any **added expression markings** (slides, bends, trills, etc) are placed above the hole numbers in italics, e.g. a bend on hole 4 inhaled would be notated as shown below.

Here is a list of all the expression markings used in the book. Each one of these techniques is introduced individually in the course of the book in the appropriate lesson.

V Indicates **hand vibrato**

S Indicates **slide**

B Indicates **half step bend**

$\overline{B}$ Indicates **whole step bend**

T Indicates **trail off**

Tr Indicates **trill**

W Indicates **grace note** (mouth wah bend)

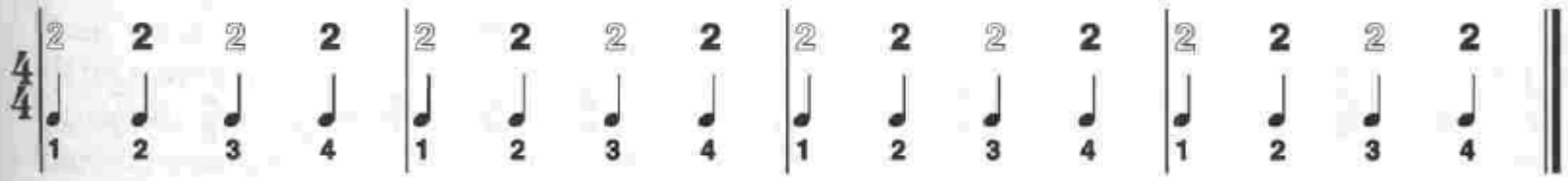
The Quarter Note

This music note is called a **quarter note**. It lasts for **one** beat. There are four quarter notes in one bar of $\frac{4}{4}$ time.

Count: 1

2.

This example contains four bars of quarter notes and uses both inhale and exhale notes on hole 2. Tap your foot on each beat and count to yourself as you play. Try to get only one note sounding each time you play.



The Quarter Rest

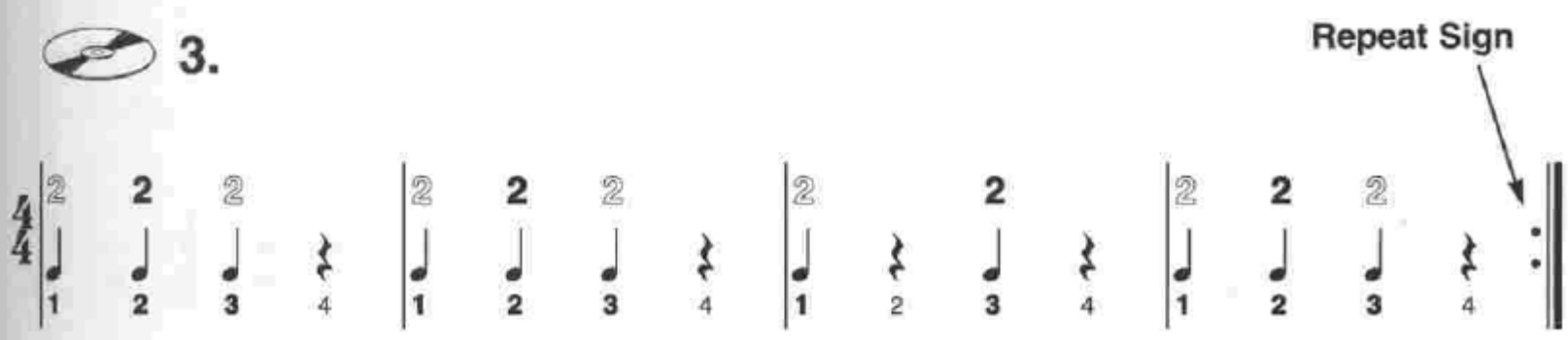
Rests are used to indicate silence in music. There are different rests for different lengths of silence just as notes indicate different lengths of sound.

This symbol is a **quarter rest.** It indicates **one beat of silence**. Do not play any note. Small counting numbers are placed under rests.

Count: 1

The following example makes use of the quarter rest. The rest provides an opportunity to breath without disrupting the flow of the music. Because the quarter rest lasts for only one beat, you will need to be quick with your breath to make sure you play the next note or chord in time. Be sure to count and tap your foot as you play. This will help you keep time regardless of whether notes or rests occur in the music. The two dots just before the double bar are called a **repeat sign**. This indicates that the example is to be played again from the beginning.

3.



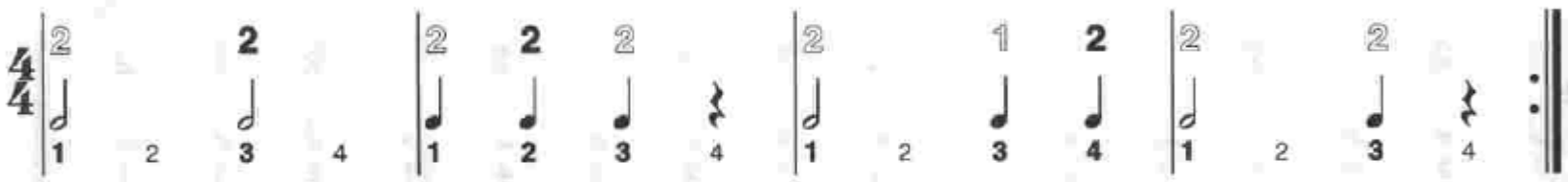
The Half Note

This music note is called a **half note**. It has a value of **two** beats. There are **two** half notes in one bar of $\frac{4}{4}$ time.

Count: 1 2

4.

This example uses half notes along with quarter notes and quarter rests. It makes use of the first hole as well as the second hole.



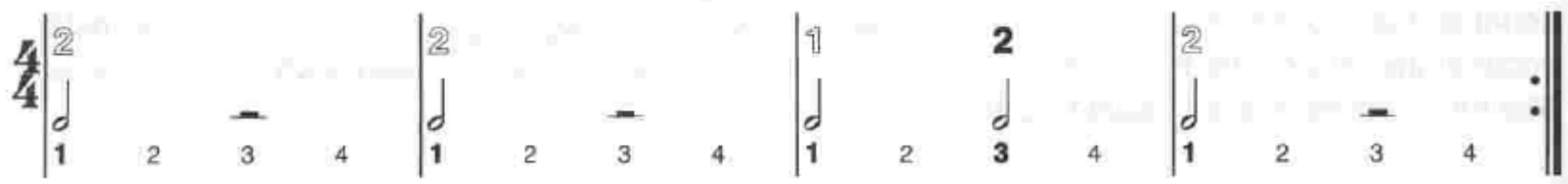
The Half Rest

This symbol is a **half rest**. It indicates **two beats of silence**.

Count: 1 2

5.

Once again, remember to tap your foot and count as you play regardless of whether you see notes or rests in the music.



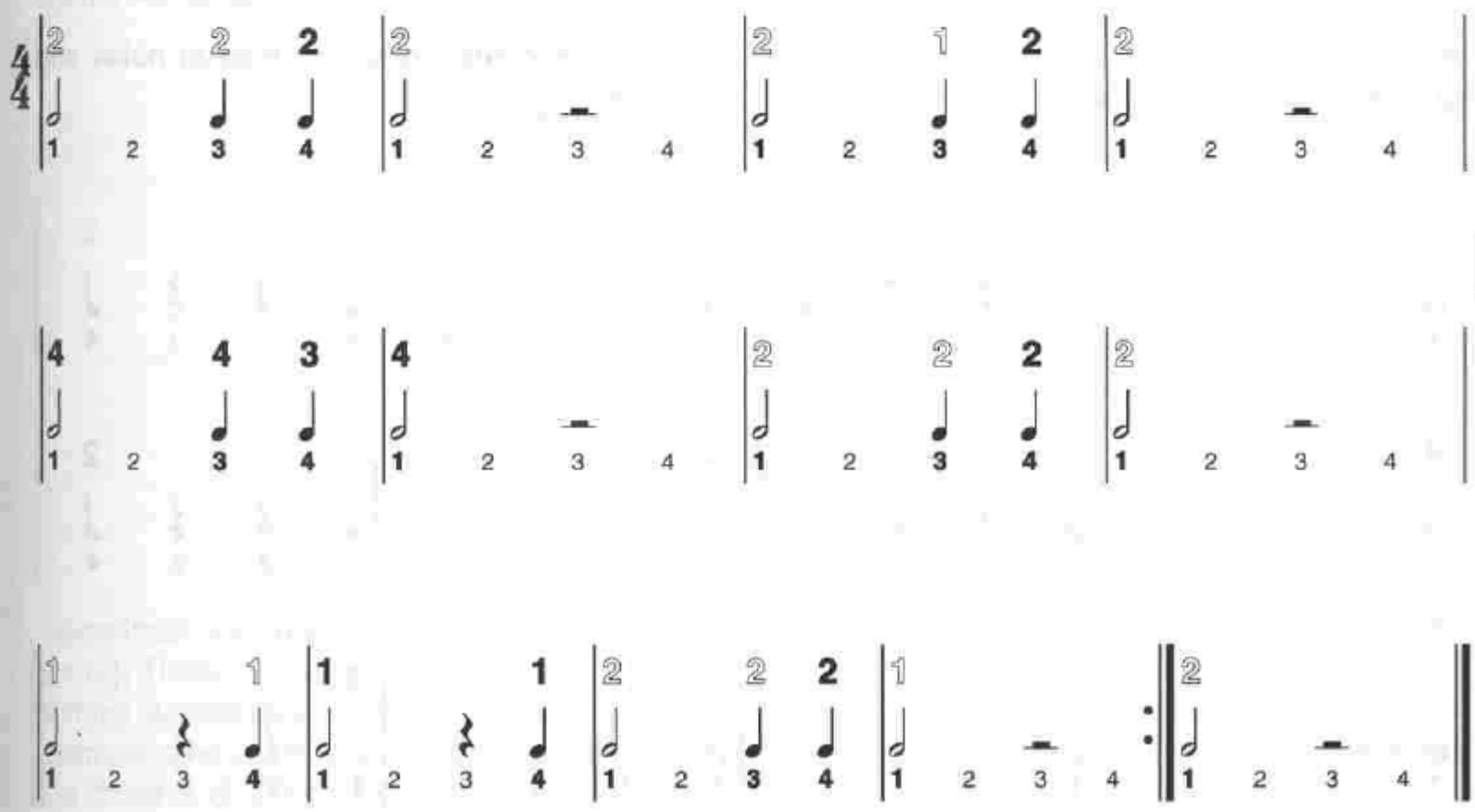
Lesson 2

Cross Harp Playing

On any harmonica, it is possible to play in more than one key even though there is a specific key written on the harmonica. The most common way of playing in another key is to use what is called **second position** or **cross harp**. This method is essential for Blues playing and is also used for other styles such as Country and Rock. When you play cross harp on the C harmonica, C is no longer the key note. The note **G** now becomes the key note. The note G can be found at holes 2, **3**, **6** and **9** This method of playing can take some time to get used to, but is essential if you wish to pursue techniques such as note bending. On page 53 there is a chart showing which key harmonica to choose for cross harp playing with every key used in music.

If you are confused and need a complete introduction to cross harp and straight harp (usually folk melodies) playing, see *10 Easy Lessons for Harmonica*. Since we are dealing specifically with Blues, we will be using cross harp playing right from the beginning in this book. This means that you will be playing in the key of G on your C harmonica. If you wish to jam with another musician (e.g. a guitarist) you will need to get them to play a Blues in the key of G to play along with them. The following example is a 12 bar Blues in the key of G. It uses all of the note and rest values you have learnt so far. Listen to the example on the CD to hear how the harmonica part sounds with the other instruments. When you are confident playing the example, try playing along with the CD.

6.



The Whole Note, The Whole Rest

Count: 1 2 3 4

This is a **whole note**. It lasts for **four** beats.
There is **one** whole note in one bar of $\frac{4}{4}$ time.
The whole note is the longest note commonly used in music.

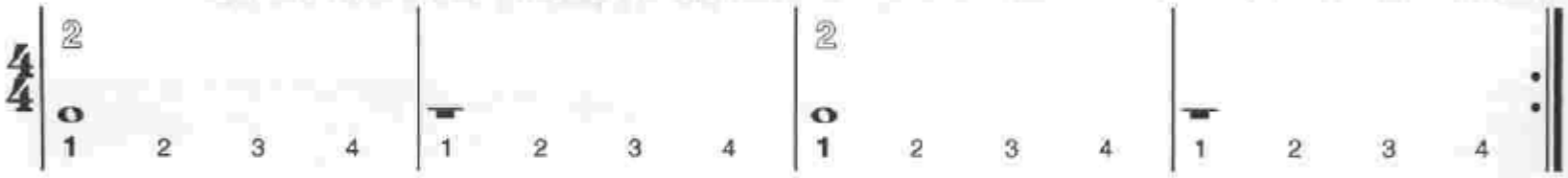
Whole Rest

Count: 1 2 3 4

The **whole rest** indicates **four beats or a whole bar of silence**. The symbol for the whole rest is very similar to that of the half rest. The difference is that the **half rest** sits **on top of the line**, while the **whole rest** hangs **below the line**.

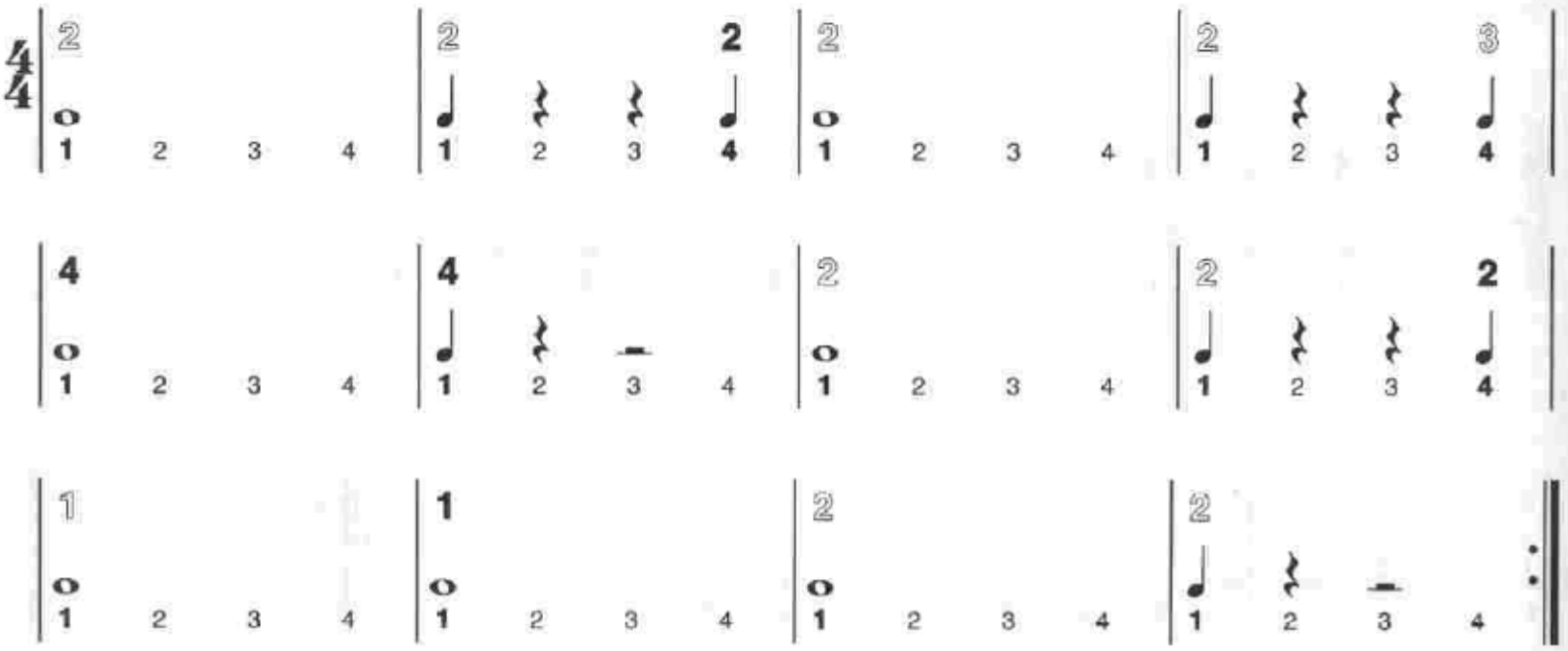
7.

Once again, count mentally and tap your foot as you play to help you keep time. Listen to the CD to hear how the full bar rests in the harmonica part leave room for the guitar to play a response to the harmonica.



8.

Here is a 12 bar Blues in the key of G which contains whole notes along with quarter notes and quarter rests. It makes use of notes on holes 1, 2, 3 and 4.



More About 12 Bar Blues

As mentioned in lesson 1, the **12 bar Blues** is a pattern of chords which repeats every 12 bars. A **chord** is a group of three or more notes played together. It is possible to play chords on the harmonica and also many other instruments including the guitar and keyboard instruments such as organ and piano. Usually an accompaniment to any melody or solo contains chords (e.g. guitar accompaniment to harmonica melody). The chords in that accompaniment come from the same key as the melody and are often built from the major scale of that key.

When you play cross harp, you are playing in the key of **G**. This means that all the scale degrees for cross harp playing relate to the note G. This means that the chords for the accompaniment will come from the G Major scale which is shown below.

G Major Scale

G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Chord Numbers

When you play any riff or melody on a 12 bar Blues progression, your notes are fitting in with a specific set of chords which can be played by a guitar (or keyboard). The chords most commonly played in Blues are built on the **first**, **fourth** and **fifth** notes of the key you are playing in. These chords are often described by the use of roman numerals. If you are playing in the key of **G**, these chords will be **G** (I), **C** (IV) and **D** (V).

G Major Scale

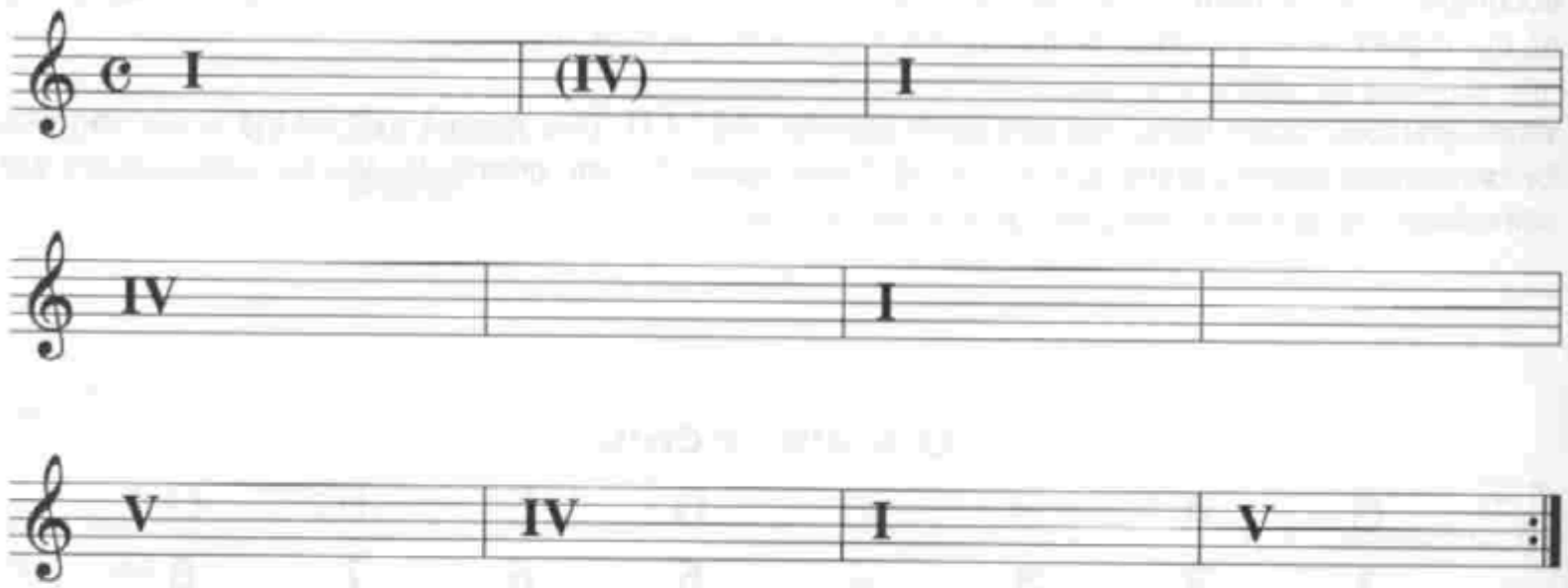
G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Chords

G	C	D
I	IV	V

Sometimes you may see other types of chord symbols such as G7 (seventh chord) or G9 (ninth chord). These are other types of chords which are common in Blues. The number in the chord symbol describes the type of chord but does not affect the position of the chord in the key. For example, any chord starting with the letter **G** will be chord I in the key of G regardless of whether the chord is G, G7 or G9.

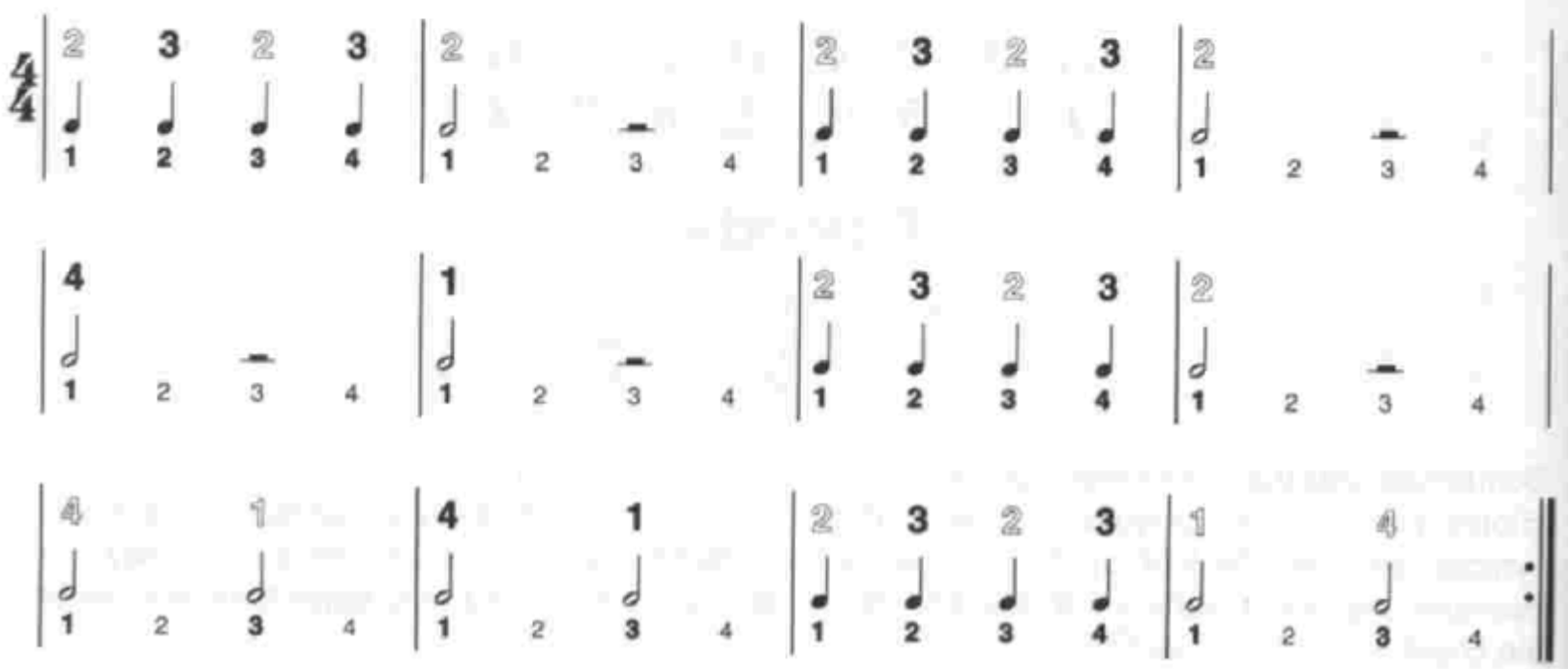
Understanding this system of numbering chords is particularly useful for learning how to play melodies which follow the 12 bar Blues structure and sound good with any accompaniment. The diagram below shows the typical positions of chords I, IV and V within the 12 bar form. The IV chord in the second bar is optional. When this chord is used, it is often called a "Quick IV". It is a good idea to memorize the progression shown below, so you will always know what chord you are playing over. When you think you know the progression well, give yourself a quiz, e.g. what chord is in bar six? (IV), bar nine? (V), bar three? (I), etc.



Root Notes

The note a chord is named from is called the **root note** (like the root of a tree). A good way to memorize a chord progression is to play only the root notes of the chords all the way through the progression. An example of this is shown below. Since chords I, IV and V in the key of G are G, C and D, you will first need to locate these notes on your harmonica. To begin with, G (I) can be found on holes 2 and **3**, C (IV) can be found on holes **1** and **4**, and D (V) can be found on holes 1 and 4. These notes can also be found in other places higher up on the harmonica, but stick to these ones for now and get to know them thoroughly.

9.

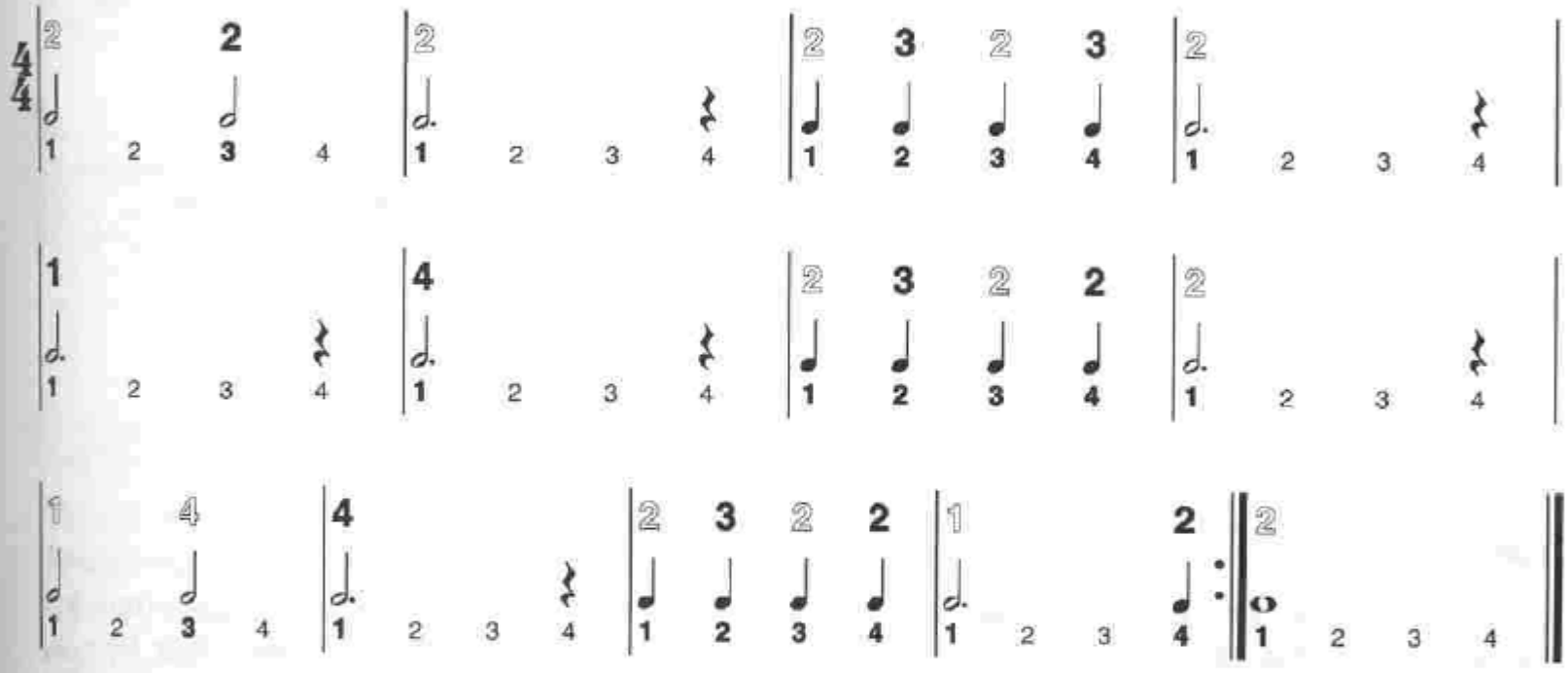


The Dotted Half Note

A **dot** written after a note extends its value by **half**.
A dot after a half note means that you hold it for **three** beats.
One dotted half note makes one bar of music in $\frac{3}{4}$ time.

The following example contains several dotted half notes and consists mainly of root notes of chords I, IV and V. Tap your foot as you play and listen to the accompaniment to hear the chord changes if you are playing along with the CD.

10.

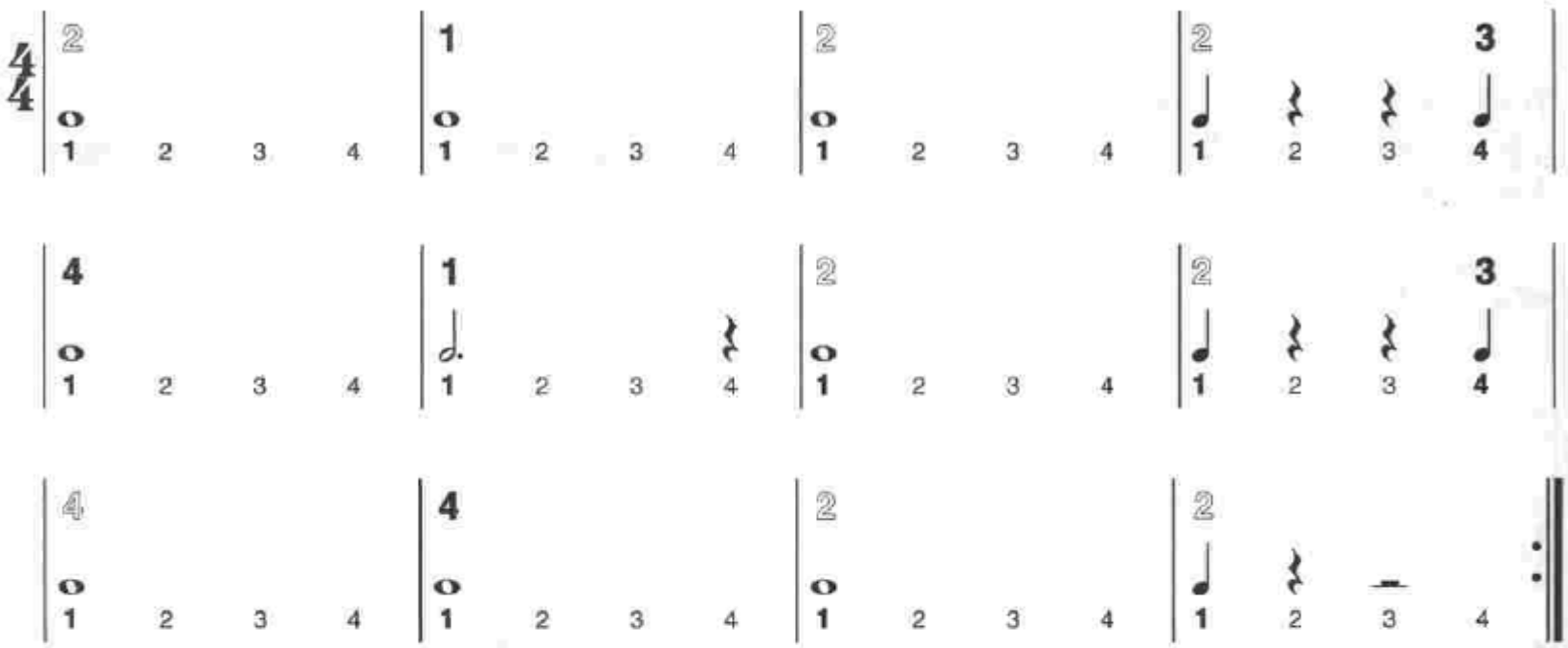


Tone Development

One of the most important aspects of learning to play any instrument is the development of a strong, consistent tone. You can often tell the difference between a good player and an average player by hearing them play a slow simple melody and listening to their tone. A good player can really make their instrument sing and make a simple melody sound very moving. As you play the examples in the book, imagine you are singing the melody through your instrument and pay particular attention to your tone. Try playing at various dynamic levels (volumes). If you have trouble maintaining a strong, even tone at all volumes, practice playing long notes (at least 4 beats) on each of the holes of the harmonica at a slow tempo. Also learn example 11 on the following page and play it regularly until you are confident of your tone. Work on tone building for short periods at a time with plenty of rest between exercises. In time you will notice a marked improvement in the consistency of your tone.

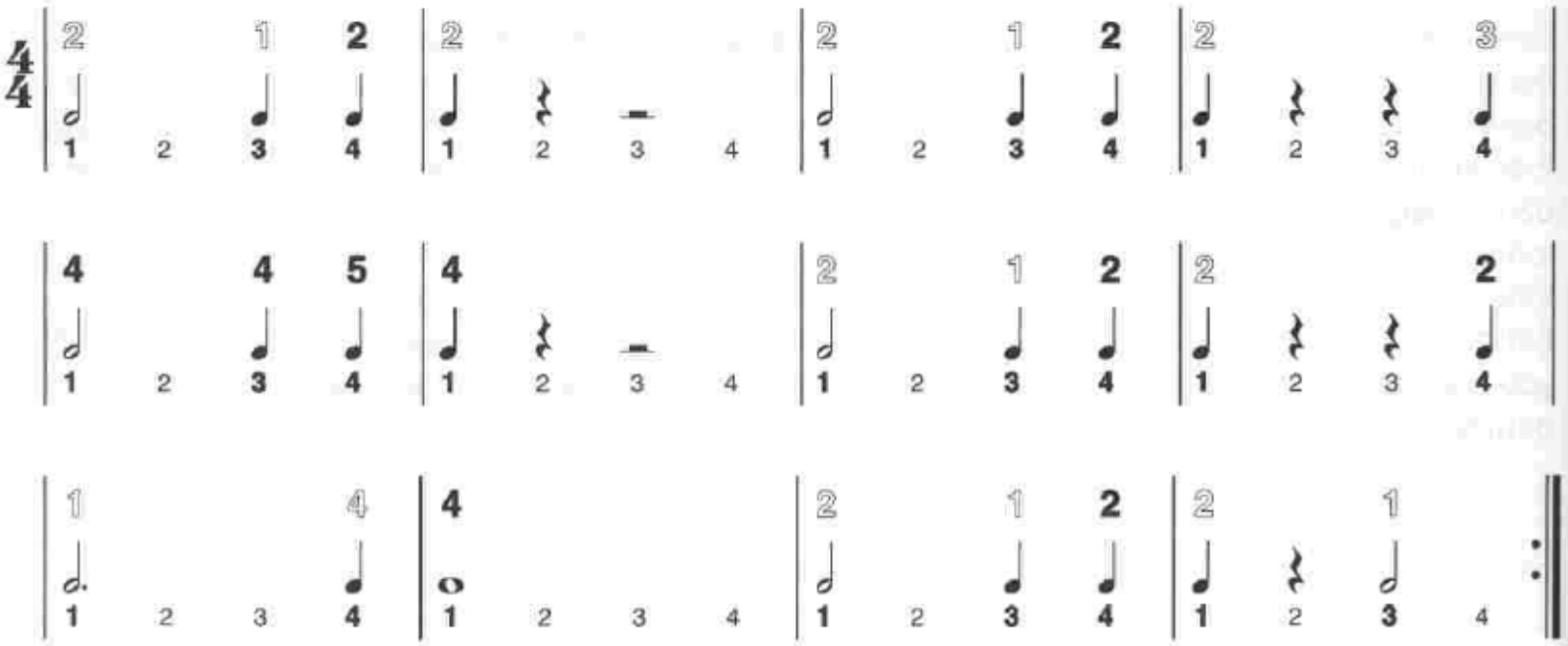
11.

As mentioned on the previous page, this example is a good exercise for building a strong, consistent tone. It contains a quick IV in the second bar.



12.

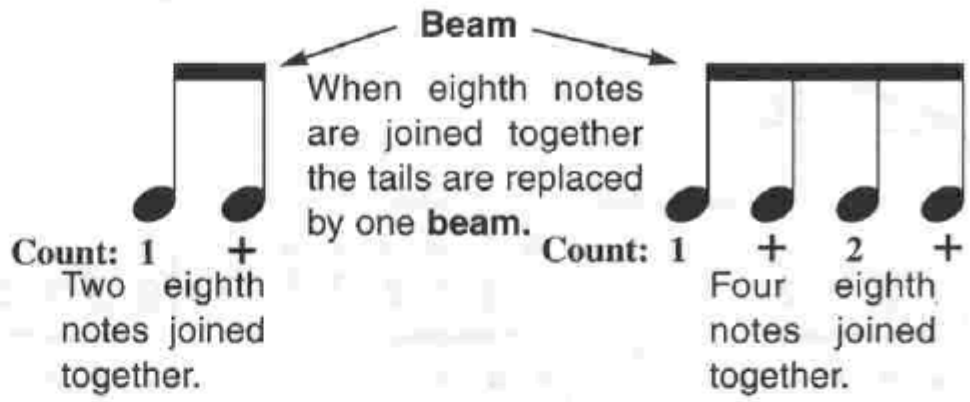
Here is another example which makes use of the quick IV. This one uses other notes apart from the roots of the chords, but the root note is still played on the at least the first beat of each bar. By now you should be starting to become familiar with the sound of the 12 bar Blues chord progression. Try to imagine the sound of the chords as you practice any 12 bar melody by yourself. This will make it easier to play with other musicians, even if you have never played with them before.



Lesson 3

The Eighth Note

This is an **eighth note**. It lasts for half a count. There are eight eighth notes in one bar of $\frac{4}{4}$ time

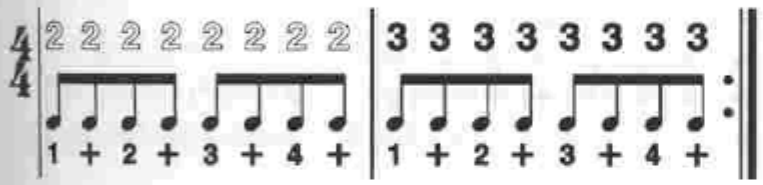


When eighth notes are joined together the tails are replaced by one **beam.**

Two eighth notes joined together.

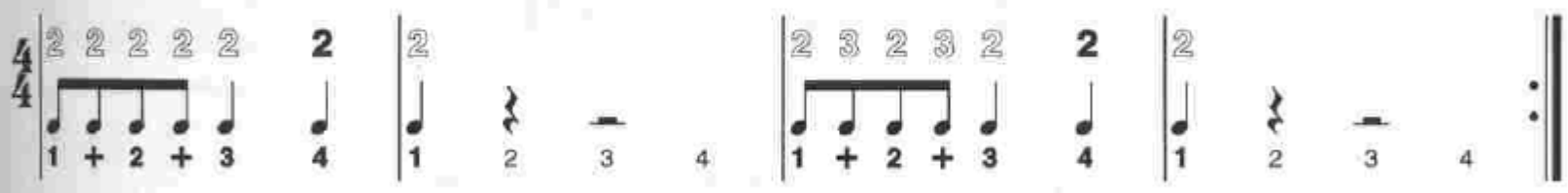
Four eighth notes joined together.

13. How to Count Eighth Notes



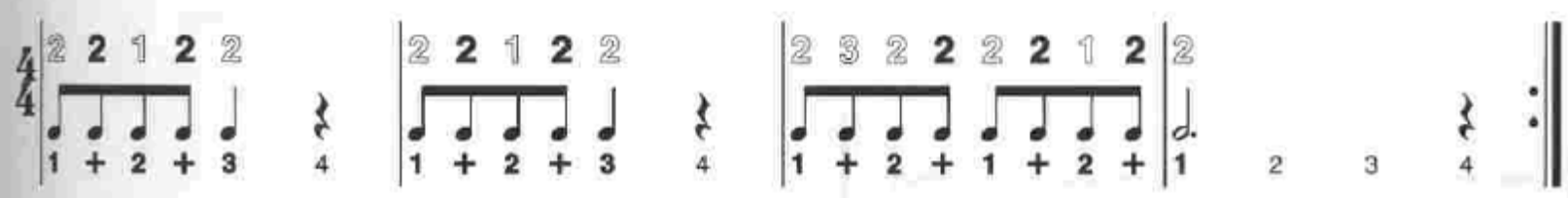
14.

Here is an example which makes use of eighth notes on the first two beats of bars 1 and 3. Remember to tap your foot on each beat as you play.



15.

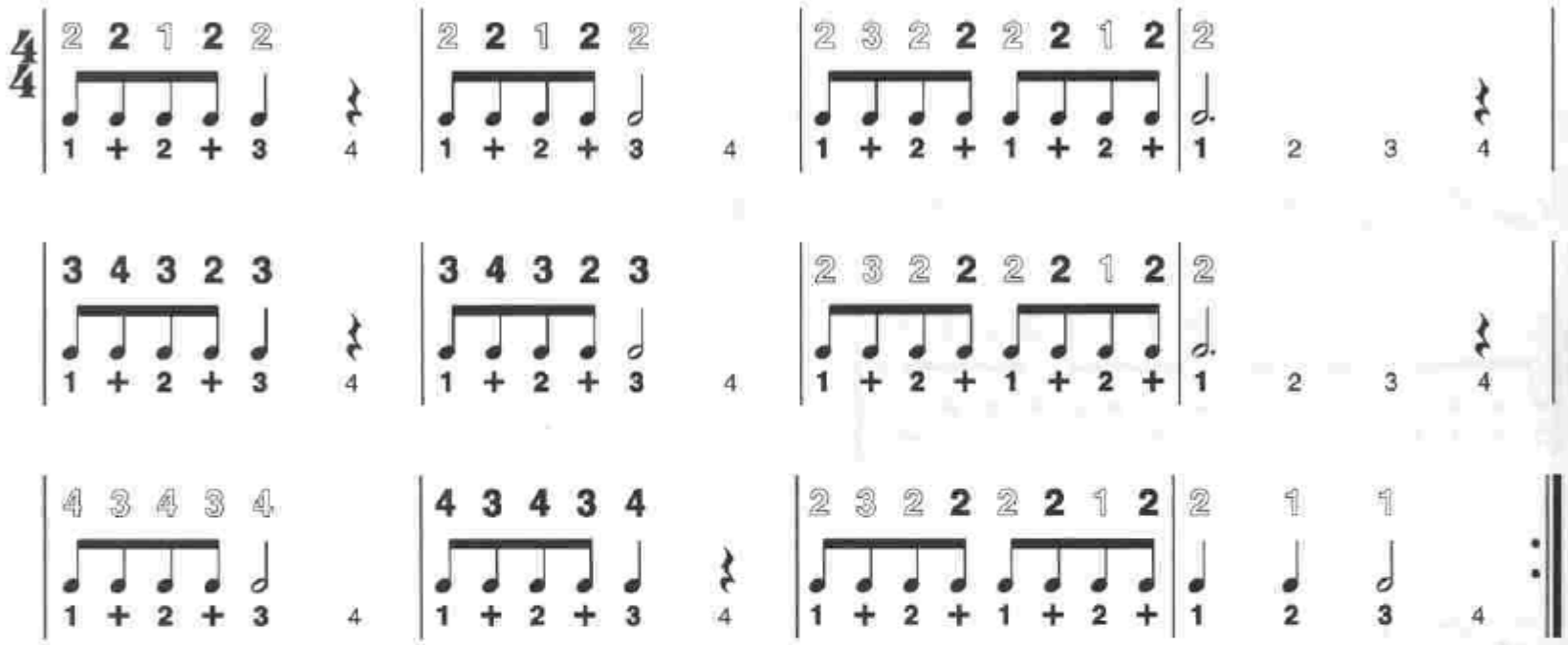
This one uses eighth notes on the first two beats of bars 1 and 2, and then on all four beats of bar 3. Take it slowly at first and make sure you are sounding all of the notes clearly and evenly.



Riffs

This one uses the phrase you learnt in the previous exercise and treats it as a **riff**. A riff is a short repeating pattern which may be altered to fit various chord changes. Riffs are very common in Blues. As you learn new notes and rhythms, try inventing some of your own riffs based on what you have learnt.

16.

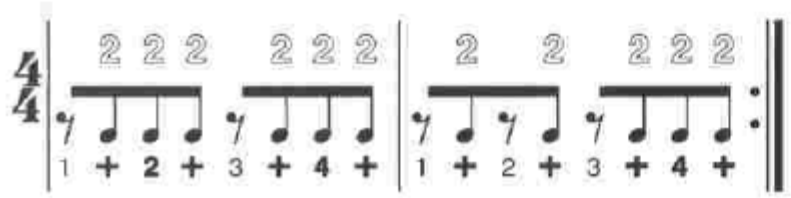


The Eighth Rest

This is an **eighth rest**.
It indicates **half a beat of silence**.

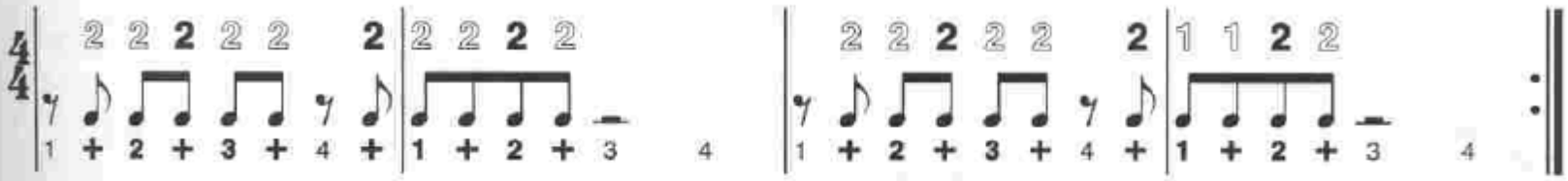
The use of eighth rests on the beat creates an effect known as **syncopation**, which means displacing the natural flow of accents from on the beat to off the beat. The following example demonstrates a syncopated rhythm created by the use of eighth rests. If you have trouble with the timing, count out loud and clap the rhythm until you are confident with it. As well as this, listen to the CD and play the rhythm along with it until you have it memorized.

17.



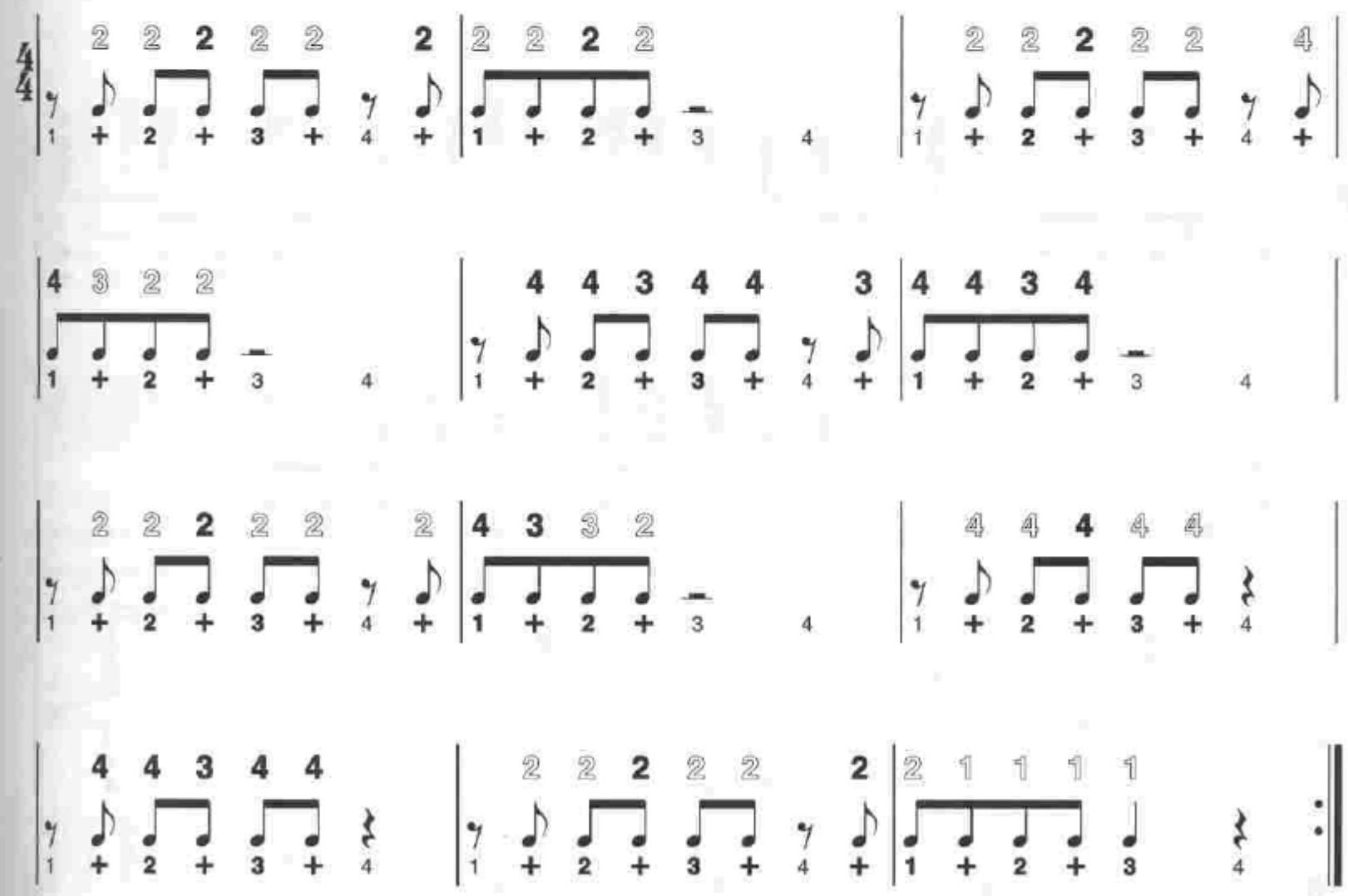
18.

Here is a riff which makes use of eighth rests on the first and fourth beats. Once again, if you have trouble with the rhythm, clap it while counting out loud and then try playing the rhythm on one note.



19.

This example takes the previous riff and expands it to fit the 12 bar Blues progression. Notice that the basic rhythm is a repeating two bar pattern; i.e. the rhythm stays the same throughout the progression, only the pitches of the notes change.

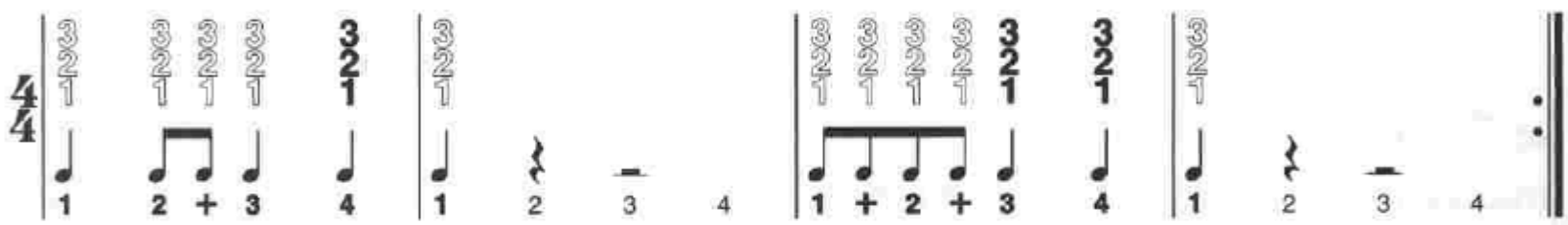


Lesson 4

Playing Chords

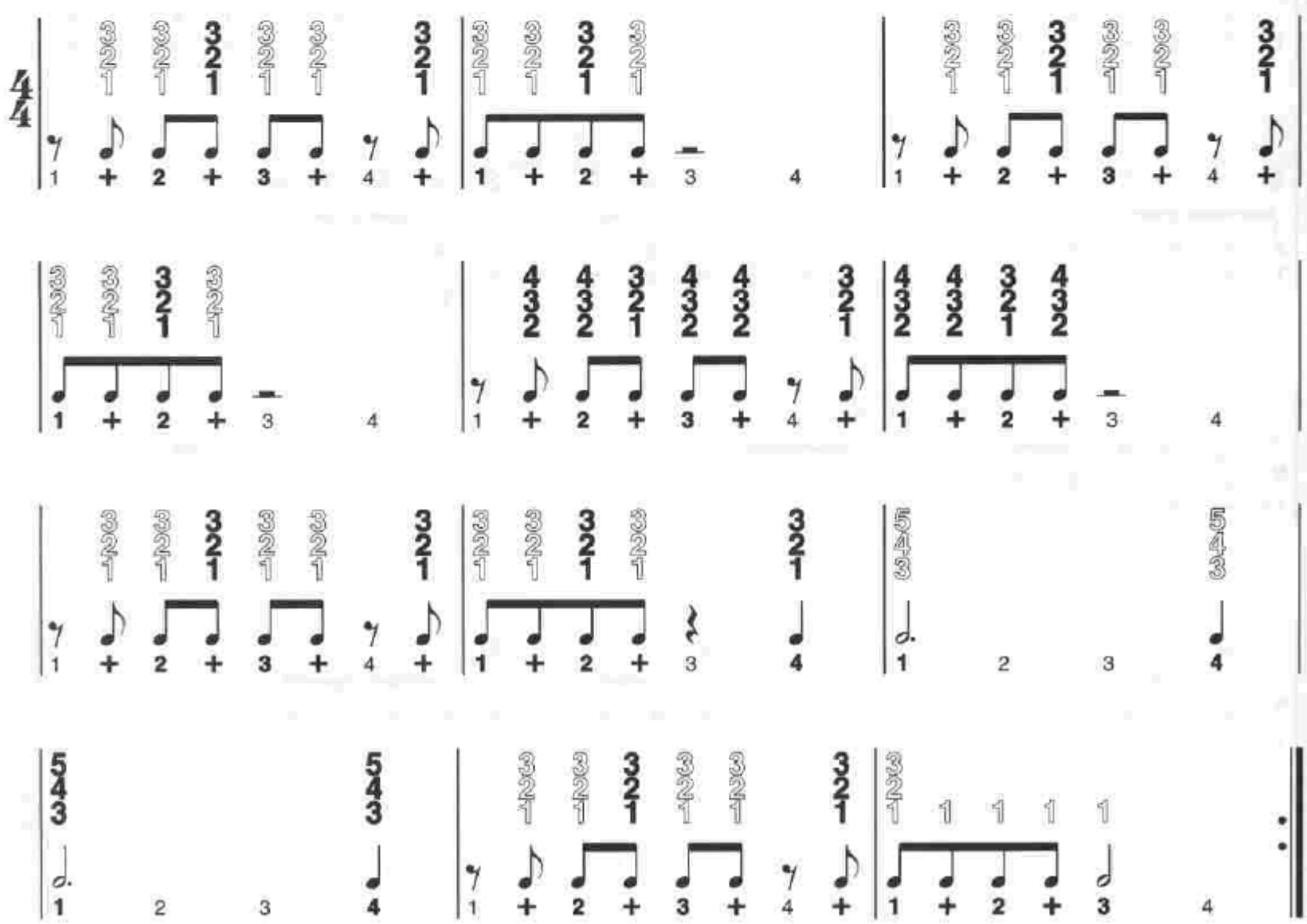
Although it is more common to play single note melodies on the harmonica, there are occasions when it is used as a rhythm instrument (e.g. accompanying a guitar solo). In this situation, it is important to be comfortable playing chords on the harmonica. The following example demonstrates a simple rhythm part which uses only the first three holes of the harmonica.

20.



21.

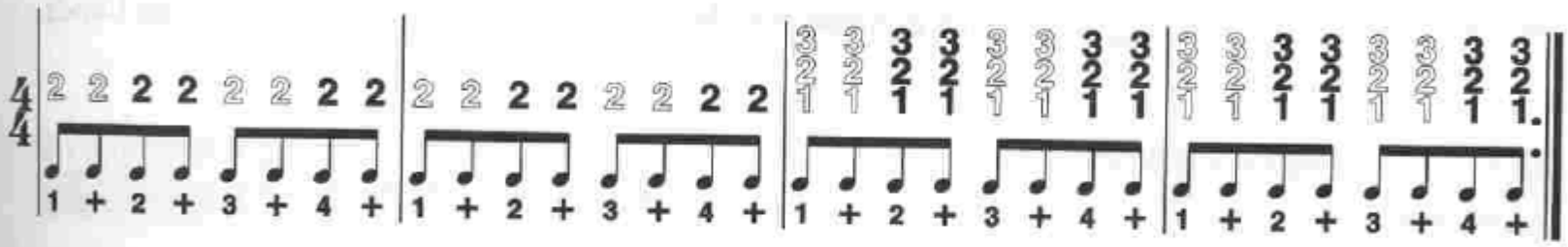
This one is a 12 bar Blues using the same rhythm as examples 18 and 19.



Double Tonguing

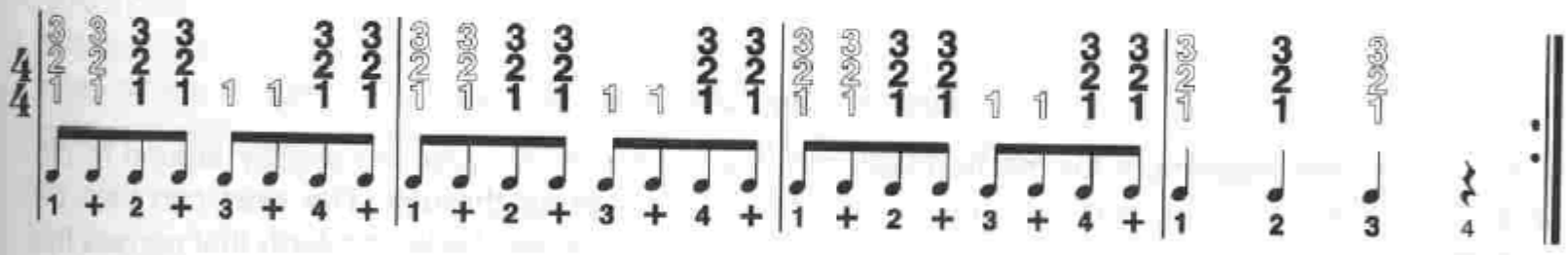
The following example uses both single notes and chords. It also features a technique known as **double tonguing**. Double tonguing means playing each group of two notes with a **"ta ka"** sound. The first note is articulated with the front of the tongue (**ta**) and the second note is articulated with the back of the tongue. Try saying **taka taka taka taka** several times before playing the following example.

22.



23.

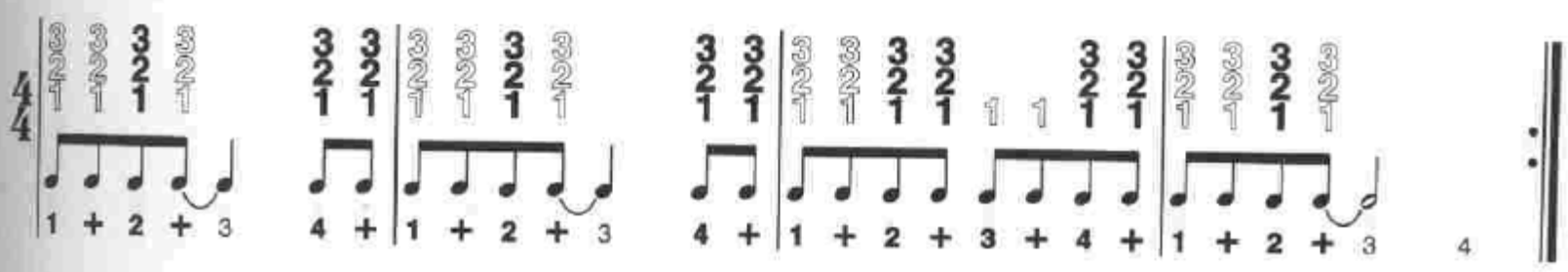
Here is a variation on the previous rhythm part. These kind of harmonica parts are often called "train rhythms". Practice each one slowly until you have it memorized and then build up speed.



The Tie

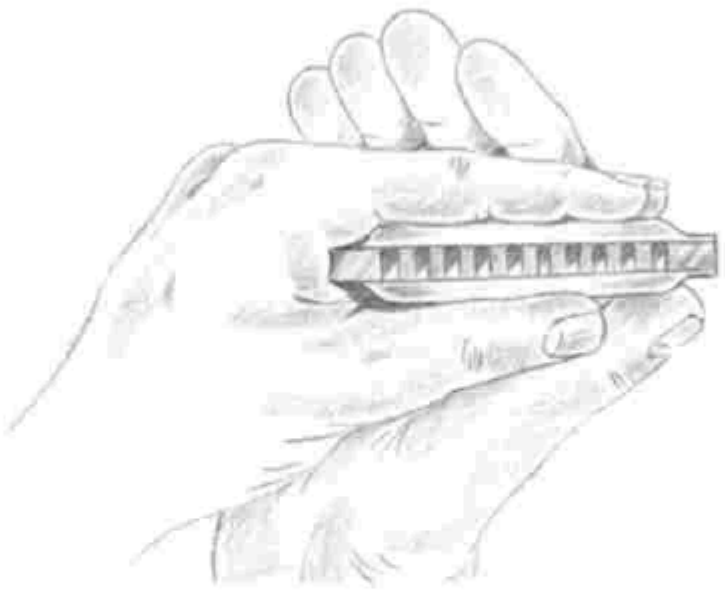
The following example demonstrates the use of **ties**. A **tie** is a curved line which connects two different notes of the same pitch. The tie tells you to play the **first** note only, and to hold it for the length of both notes. A tie may occur either **across a bar line**, or **within one bar**. Tap your foot and count as you play to help you keep track of the beats.

24.

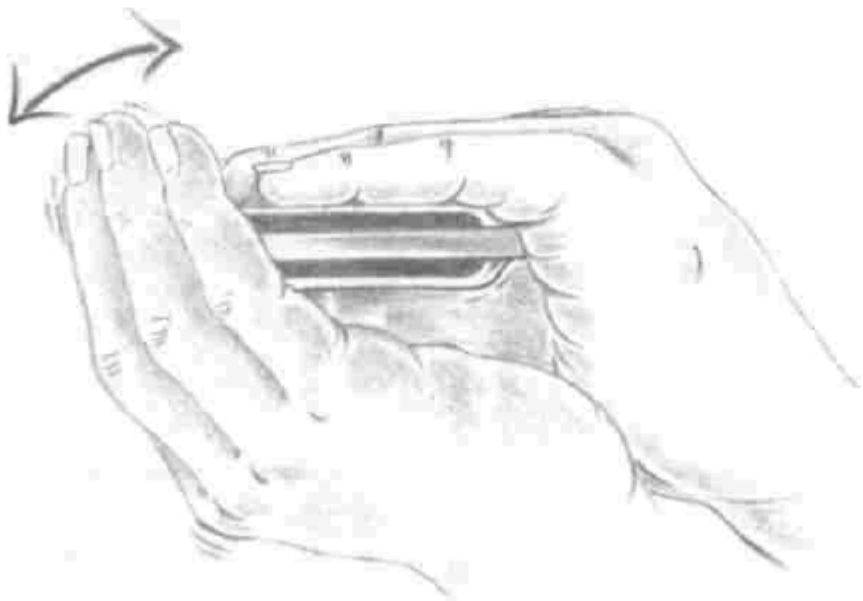


Hand Vibrato

Hand vibrato or "wah wah" is an effect which is used to add expression to harmonica playing. If you have ever seen a good harmonica player, it is likely that you have seen them using this technique. To somebody watching, it looks like the player is waving or fluttering one hand back and forth while holding the harmonica with the other. The hand vibrato alters the flow of air through the harmonica, thus altering the sound. When playing the hand vibrato, the right hand is moving between two basic positions. The first is formed by cupping the right hand around the left in its normal holding position, as shown in the diagram below. The heels of both hands should be touching and the right hand fingers should curl up along the left hand little finger and around and upwards past the end of the left hand little finger and ring finger. This position results in the air being closed off by the two hands.

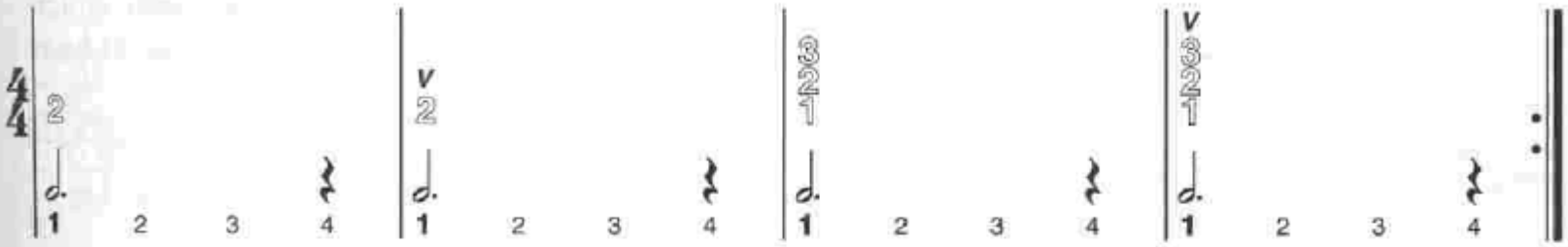


To complete the movement for the hand vibrato, the right wrist is swivelled slightly around to the right. This results in the "cup" being opened up and allowing air through. The wrist can then be swivelled back to the left to close the cup again. It is this movement back and forth that causes the vibrato or wah wah effect to sound. The hand vibrato is indicated in the notation by a ***V*** above the note or chord to which it applies. Experiment with slow, medium and fast vibrato, there is no right or wrong speed for this technique, as different approaches will sound best in different musical situations. Listen to the following example to hear a demonstration of hand vibrato.



25. Hand Vibrato

This example uses the hand vibrato on both notes and chords. Listen to the recording to hear the difference between notes played without vibrato and notes played with vibrato.

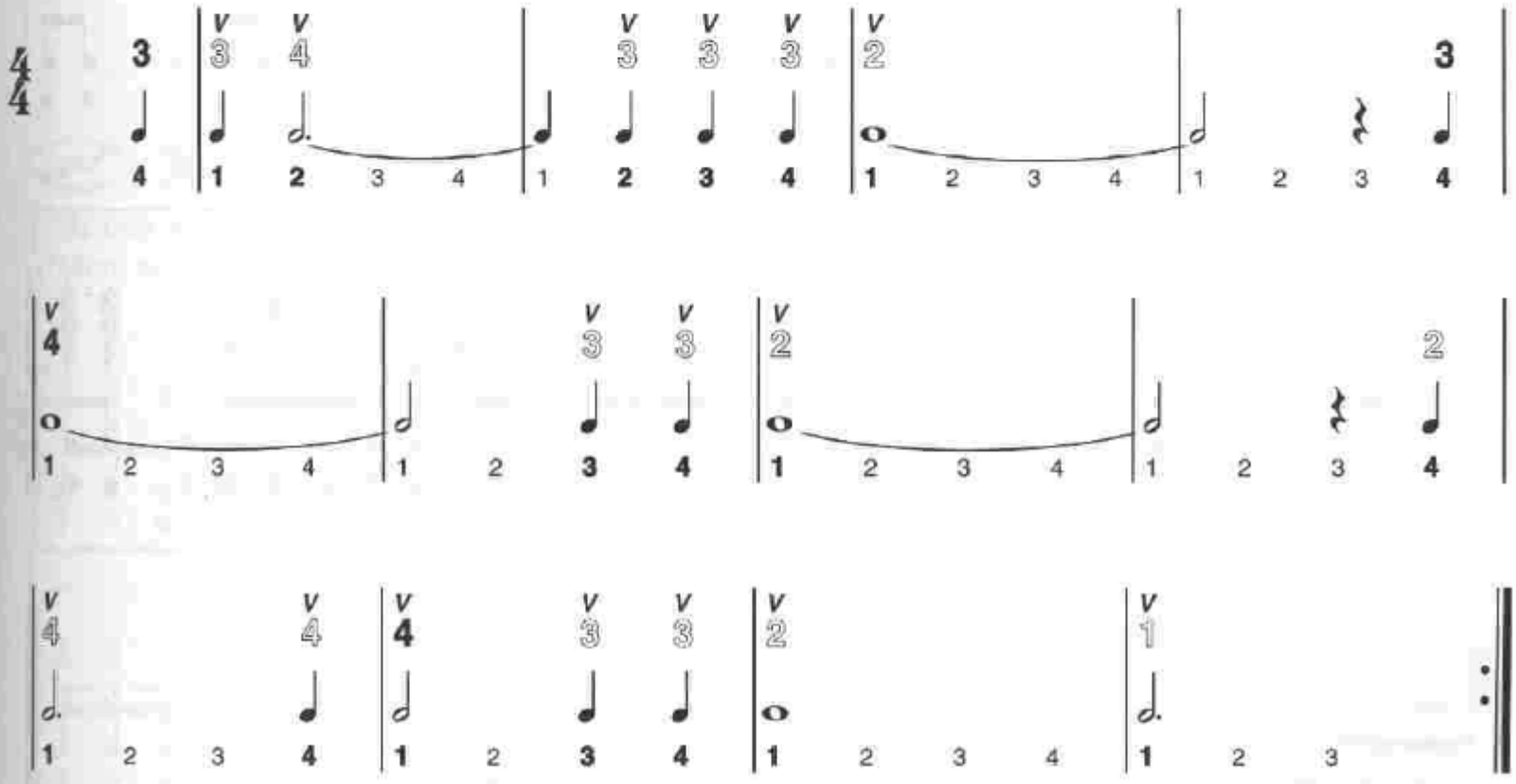


The Lead-in

Sometimes a song does not begin on the first beat of a bar. Any notes which come before the first full bar are called **lead-in notes** (or pick-up notes). When lead-in notes are used, the last bar is also incomplete. The notes in the lead-in and the notes in the last bar add up to one full bar.

26.

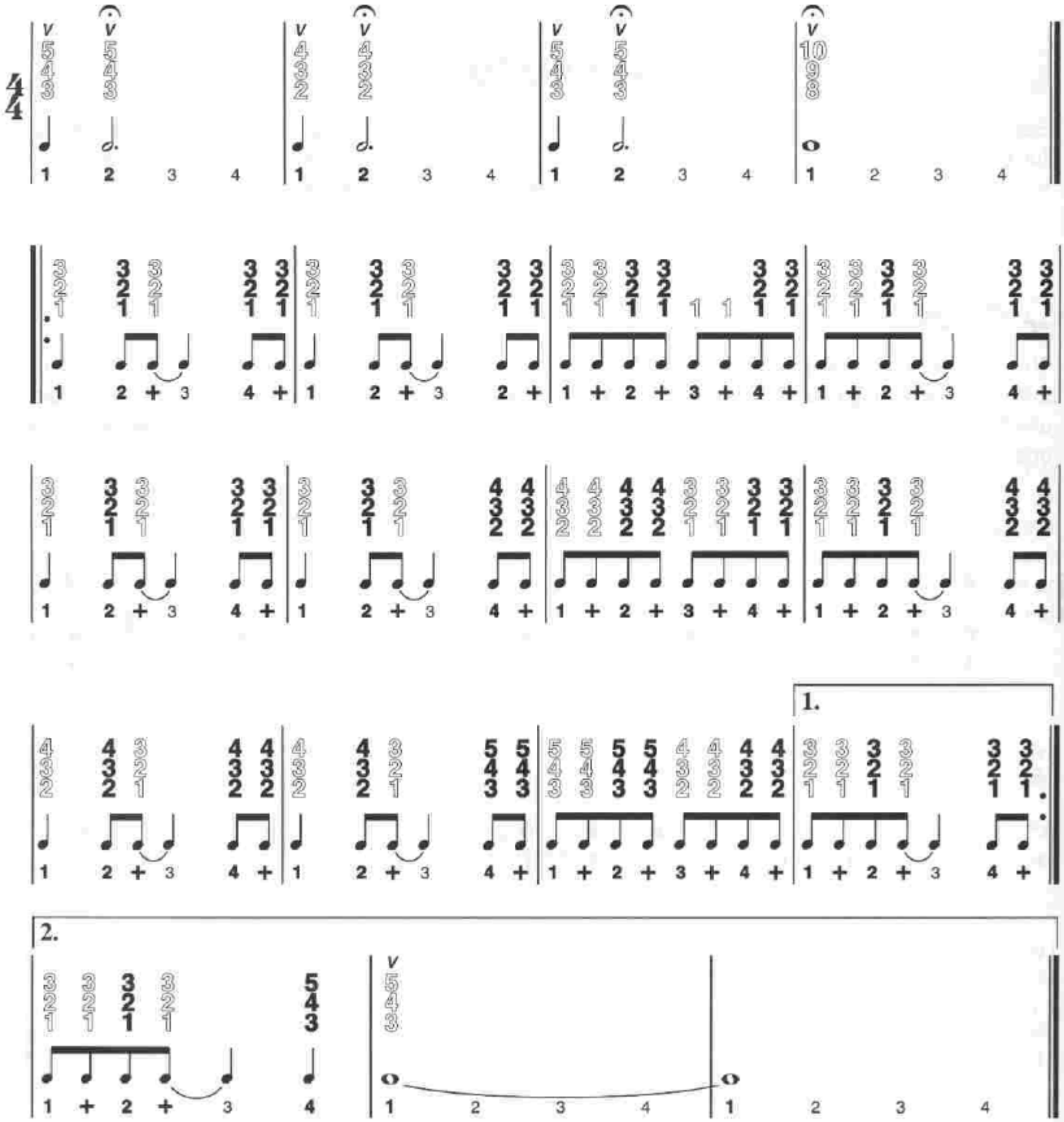
This 12 bar Blues makes use of a lead-in note. Remember to use hand vibrato where indicated. In this example, a single hand movement is used on quarter notes while multiple hand movements are used on the longer notes. Listen to the CD to hear the effect. Once you are comfortable with this one, try adding hand vibrato to other melodies you have learnt.



The Train Whistle

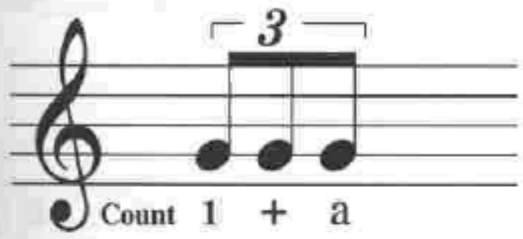
A common sound effect which makes use of the wah wah sound is the **train whistle**. As you play the following example, actually mouth the words **wah wah** at the same time as you use the hand wah wah technique. This will also prepare you for other harmonica techniques introduced later in the book. This example combines the train whistle with a train rhythm. Another important thing to notice in this example is the symbol above some of the notes in the first line. This is called a **fermata**, which tells you to play the note and then pause before going on to the next note. Listen to the CD to hear the effect this produces.

27. Southbound Train



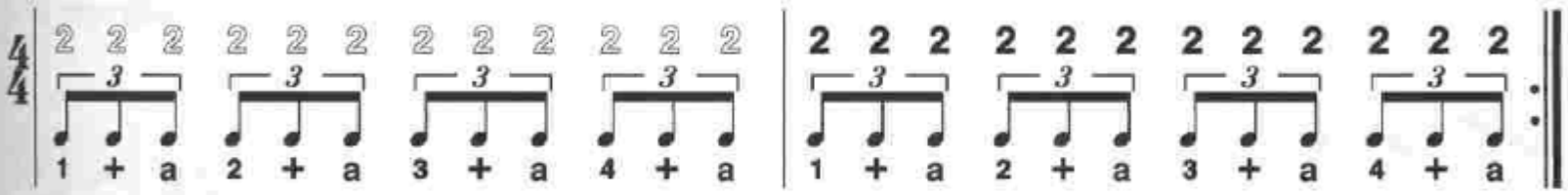
Lesson 5

The Triplet



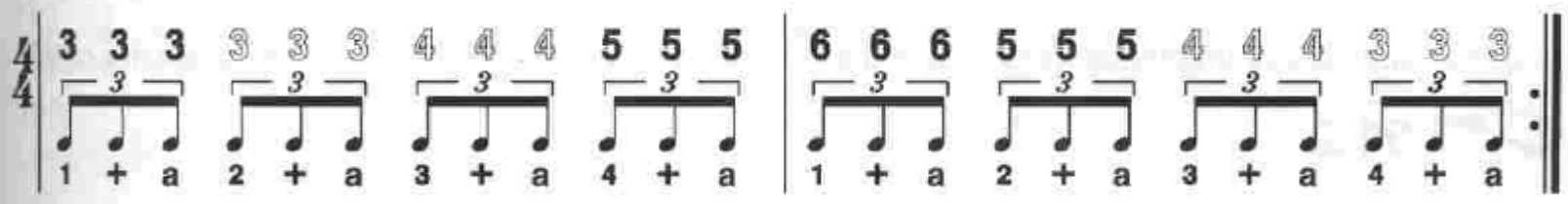
An eighth note **triplet** is a group of **three** evenly spaced notes played within one beat. Triplets are indicated by three eighth notes grouped together by a bracket (or a curved line) and the numeral *3*. The eighth note triplets are played with one third of a beat each. Triplets are easy to understand once you have heard them played. Listen to the following example on the CD to hear the effect of triplets.

28. How to Count Triplets



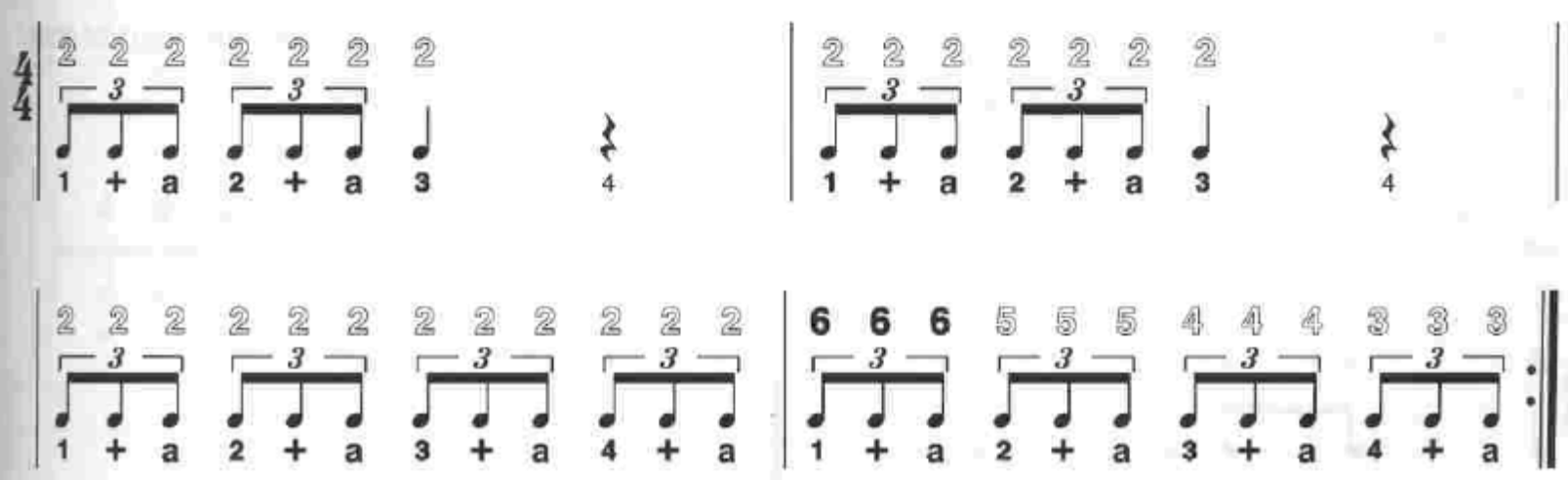
29.

Here is a riff which uses a triplet rhythm. Make sure you play all of the notes clearly and evenly.



30.

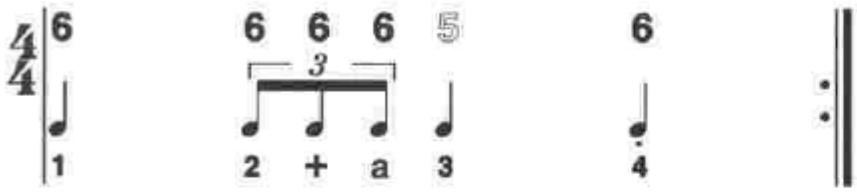
This one is a Blues intro riff which could be used for a song. Listen to how effectively this triplet rhythm works with the other instruments.



Swing Rhythms

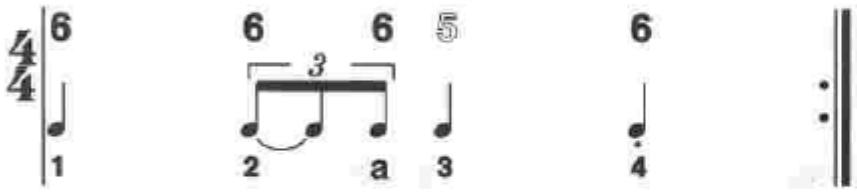
A **swing rhythm** can be created by playing only the first and third notes of a triplet. Play the following example which contains a triplet on the second beat.

31.0



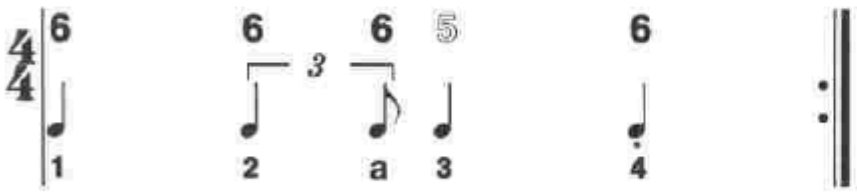
This example has the first and second notes of the triplet group tied. This gives the example a swing feel.

31.1



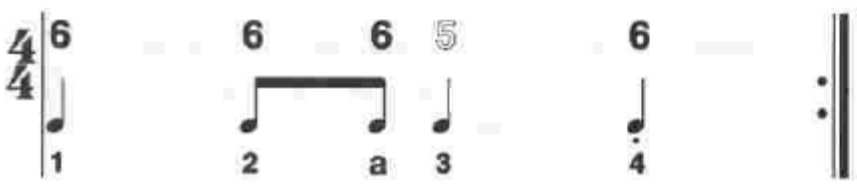
The two eighth note triplets tied together in the previous example can be replaced by a quarter note.

31.2



To simplify notation, it is common to replace the with , and to write at the start of the piece as illustrated below in example 31.3.

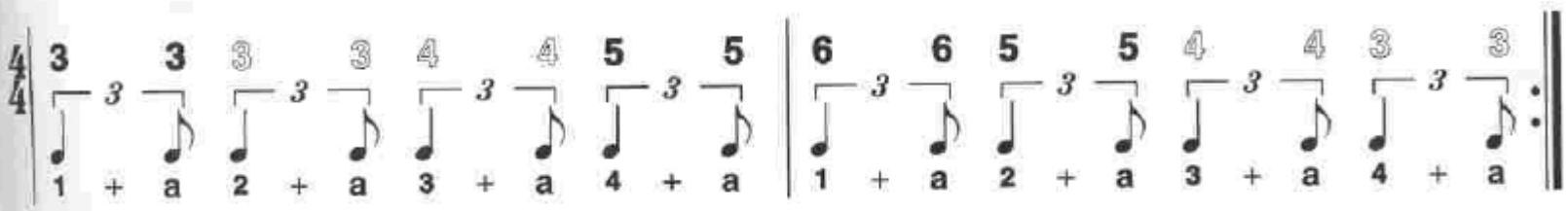
31.3

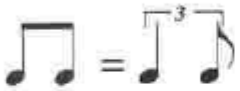


The Shuffle

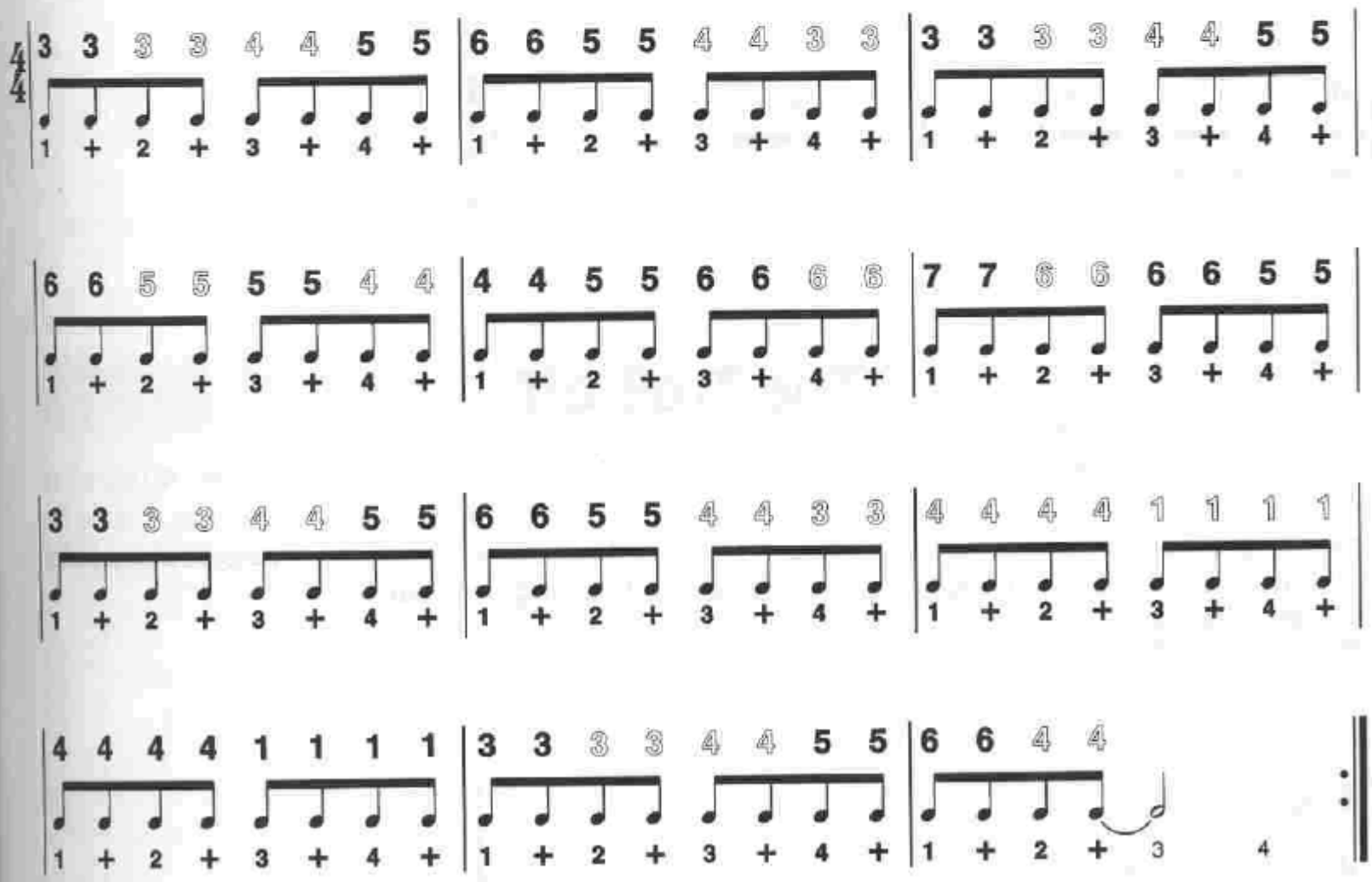
By using a constant stream of swinging eighth notes, an effect known as the **shuffle** is produced. The following example contains the now familiar cross harp Blues riff played as a shuffle.

32.



33. 

Here is the same riff extended to a full 12 bar Blues progression. Remember to swing the 8th notes, as indicated by the symbol above.

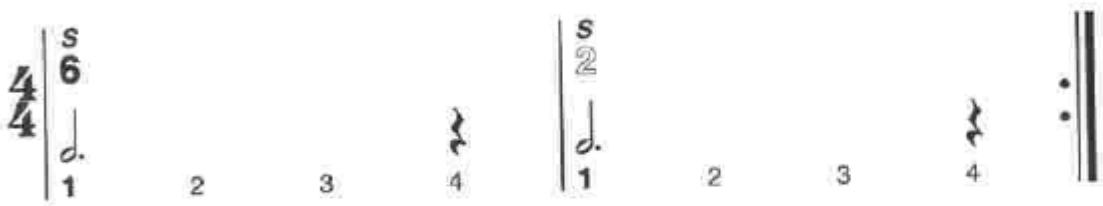


Lesson 6

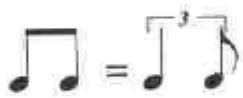
Sliding Between Notes

Another common harmonica technique is to slide up or down to a specific note. This can really add drama and excitement to your playing. The symbol for a slide is a letter ***S*** above the note to which you are sliding, as shown here. Listen to the following example on the CD to hear the effect created by the use of slides.

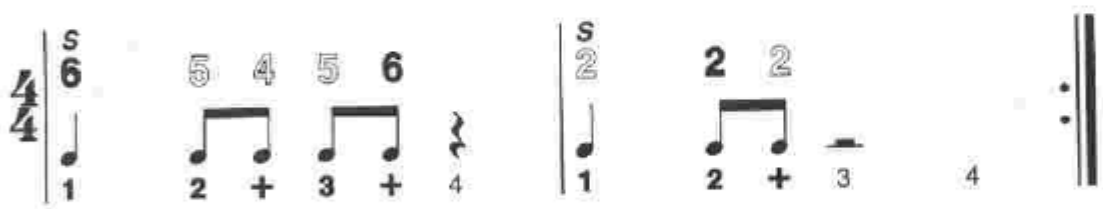
34.0



34.1



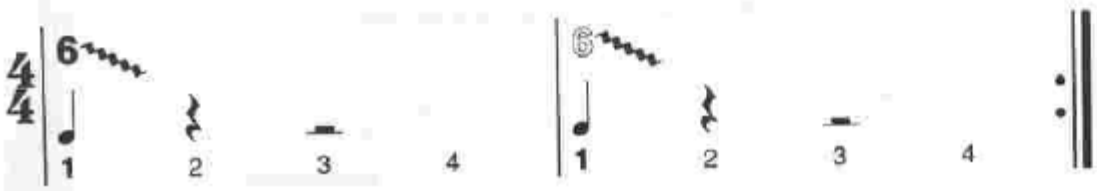
Here is a riff which makes use of slides. Once again, remember to swing the eighth notes.



The Trail-off

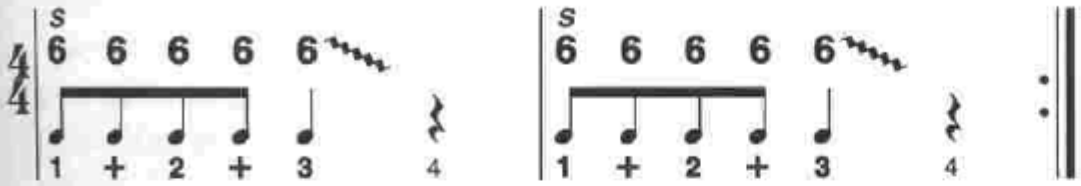
There is another effect called a trail off (or fall-off) which is the reverse of the slide. A trail-off is achieved by playing a note and then sliding away to an indefinite pitch. This technique is used on many instruments and is sometimes called a fall-off or a glissando. A trail-off is indicated by a letter ***T*** above the note to which it applies, as shown in the following example.

35.0



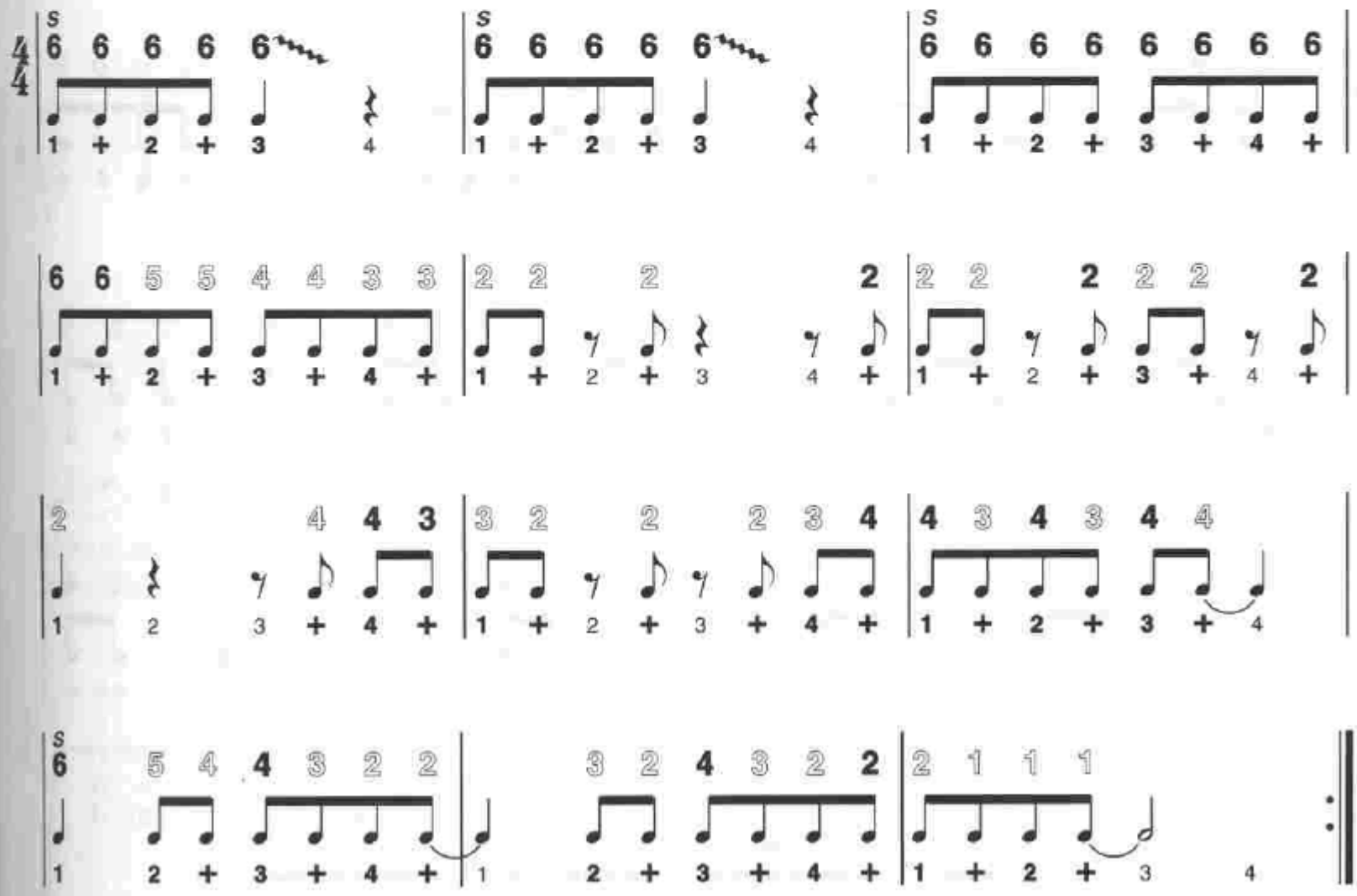
35.1

This one makes use of both slides and trail-offs.



36.

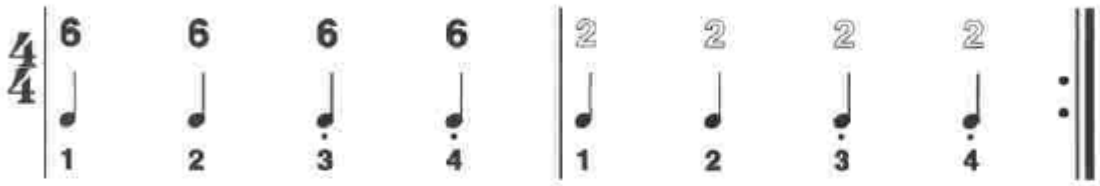
Here is a 12 bar Blues solo which makes use of most of the things you have learnt so far. Once you are confident using syncopated rhythms created by the use of rests and ties, and expressive techniques like slides and trail-offs, your playing will sound more professional and you will be ready to begin improvising your own Blues riffs.



Staccato

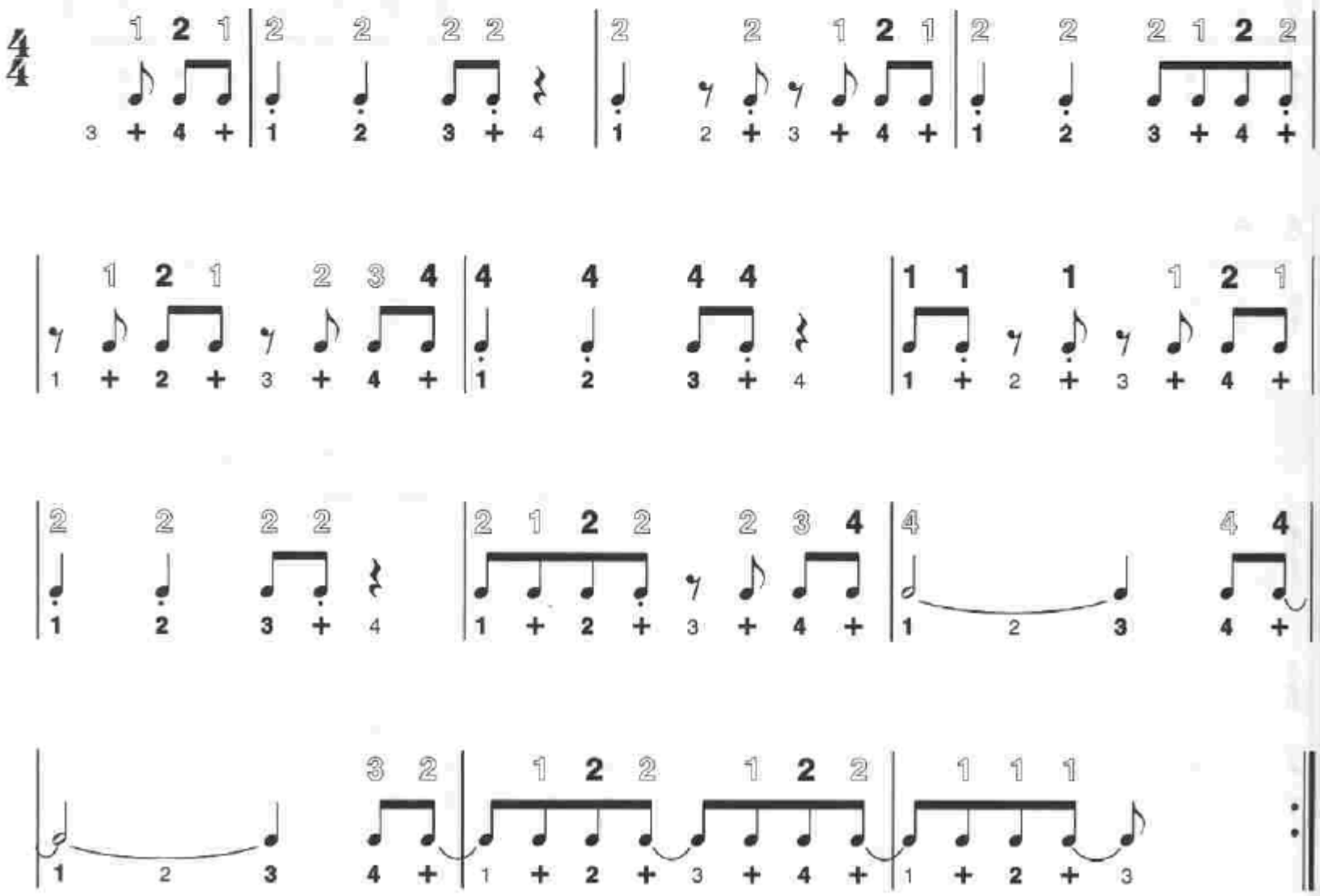
A dot placed above or below a note tells you to play the note **staccato.** Staccato means to play a note short and separate from other notes. There are two ways to play a note staccato. If you are tonguing the note, make a "**dot**" sound with your tongue. If you are not tonguing the note, make a "**huck**" sound with the back of your tongue. Both these methods cut off the flow of air, thus stopping the note short.

37.



38.

Now try this Shuffle solo which features the use of staccato notes.

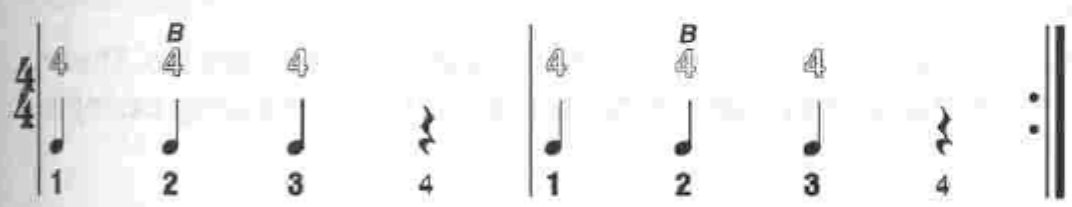


Bending Notes

One of the most exciting sounds in harmonica playing is the use of note bending. This technique can be difficult at first and may take several months to gain control of, but is essential for Blues playing, so it is definitely worth developing. The most common bends are the **inhale** notes on the low end of the harmonica, from 1 to 6. It is also possible to bend exhale notes on the high end of the harmonica. However, this is a more advanced technique and is not dealt with here. To bend a note, the **back of your tongue** (not the tip) needs to move **up and back** to the back of your mouth. This changes the flow of air, resulting in the note "bending" **downwards to a lower pitch**. A good way to get the right feel for the movement required for bending notes is to say the word **Yo**, or **Yaw**. Another useful exercise to prepare you for bending is to **whistle a descending major scale**. As you do this, notice how the the back of your tongue moves back towards your throat as the pitch gets lower.

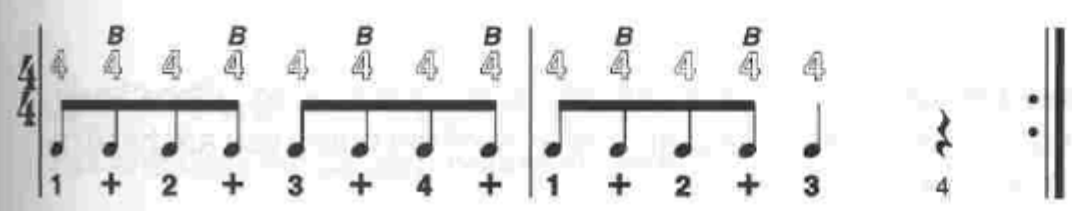
39.0

This example demonstrates a half step bend on the inhale note of hole 4, as indicated by the letter *B* above the note. Everyone has trouble with bending at first and many people can't do it at all when they begin, so be patient and keep at it. In time, your perseverance will definitely pay off.



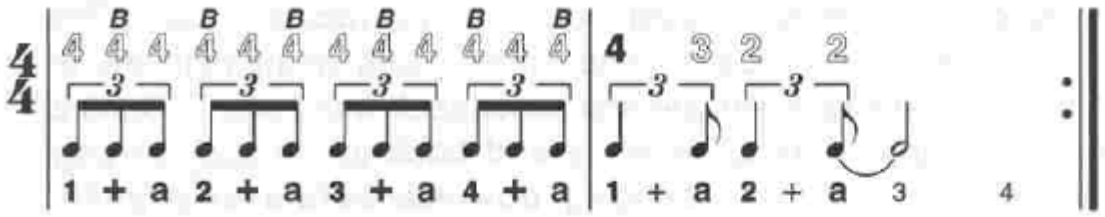
39.1

Here is an exercise to help you gain control of note bending. Listen carefully as you play and keep the notes even.

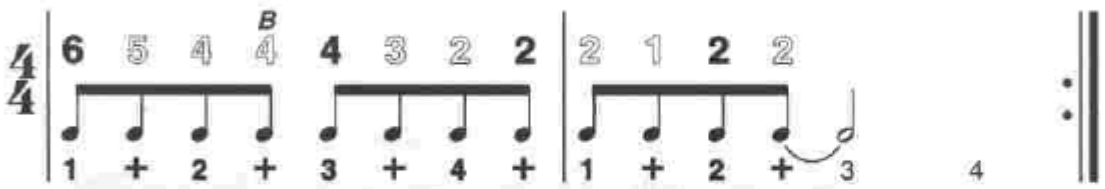


40.

Now try these Blues licks which make use of the note bend you have just learnt. A **lick** is a short musical phrase which can be used as a basis for improvisation or joined with other licks to form a solo.



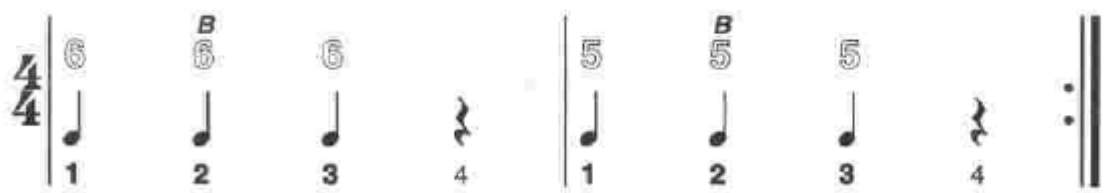
41.



More Notes to Bend

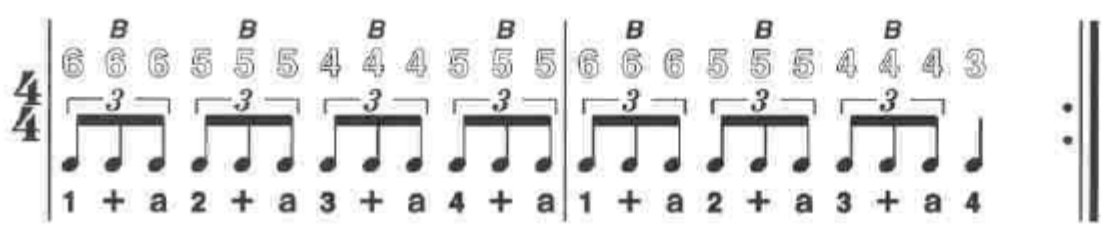
Once you can bend the 4 note, try moving to holes 5 and 6 and bending these notes too. These are also half step bends and like the 4 bend, they may be difficult at first. The following example demonstrates these two bends.

42.0



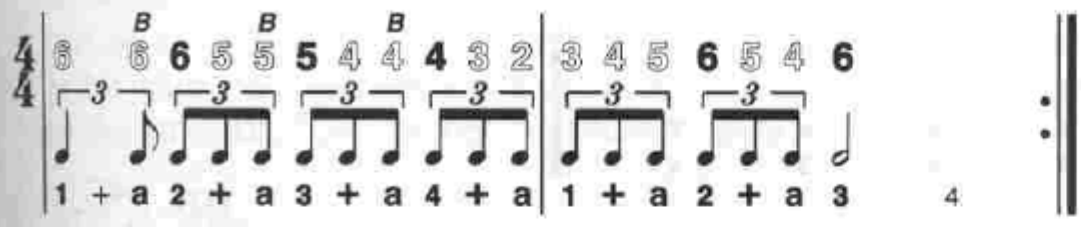
42.1

Here is an exercise to help you gain control of all three of the bends you have learnt. Once again, listen carefully as you play and keep the notes even. If you are not sure of the notes you are bending to, listen to the example on the CD and then try to copy it.



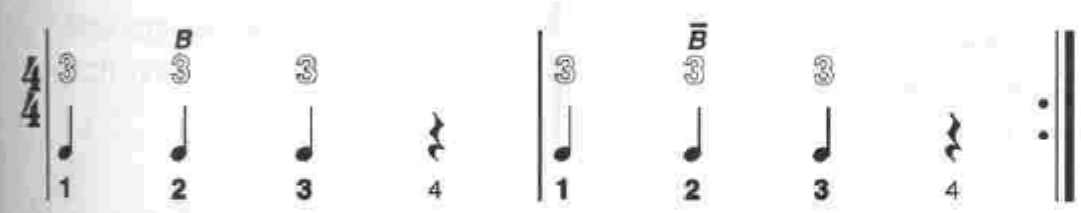
43.

Here is a Blues lick which makes use of bends on holes 4, 5 and 6.



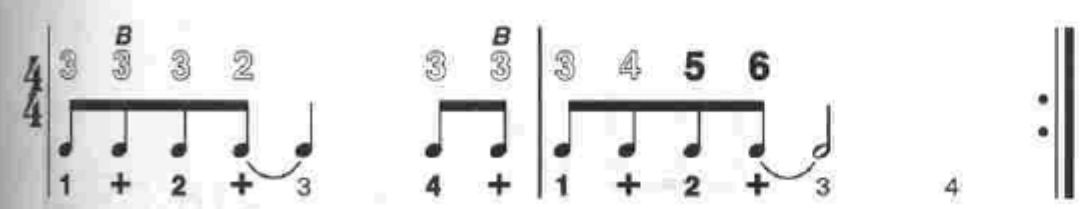
If you bend notes on hole 3, there are two possibilities instead of one. One of these is a **half step bend** and the other is a **whole step bend** which is a lower pitch than the first bend. A whole step bend is indicated by a line above the letter **B** ($\overline{\mathbf{B}}$)The following example demonstrates both these bends.

44.0

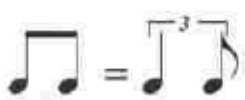


44.1

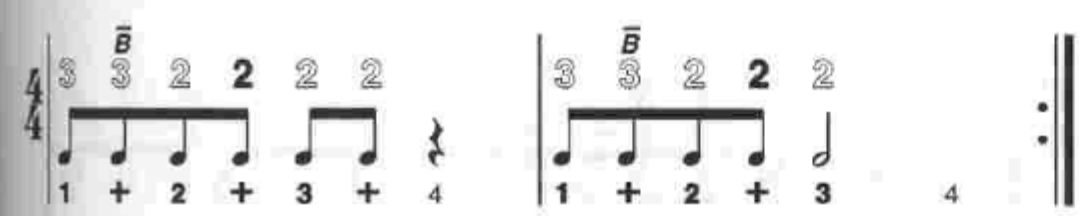
Here is a lick which makes use of half step bends on hole 3.



44.2

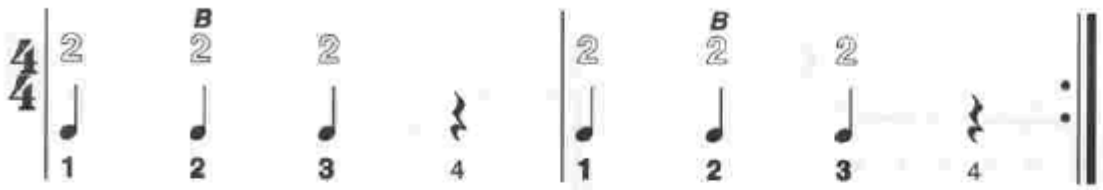


This one uses whole step bends on hole 3.



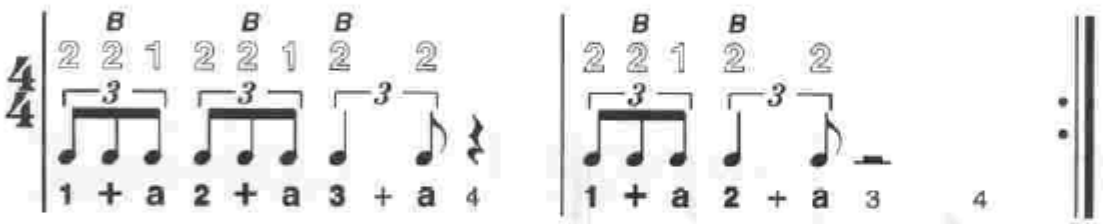
The next bend you will learn is another whole step bend, this time on hole 2. Like hole 3, there are two possible bends available here, but the half step bend is rarely used. Listen to the CD to hear the correct pitch to bend to.

45.



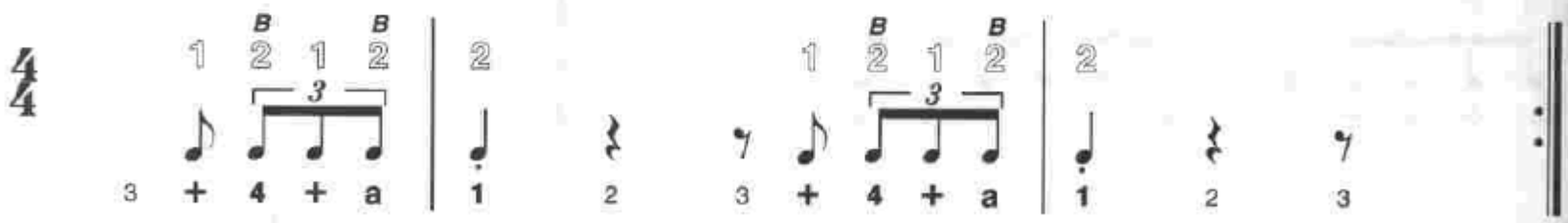
46.

The following licks should help you gain control of the whole step bend on 2. This is one of the most difficult bends, so be patient with it and as with any other technique or lick you find difficult, practice it often but only for a short period each time.



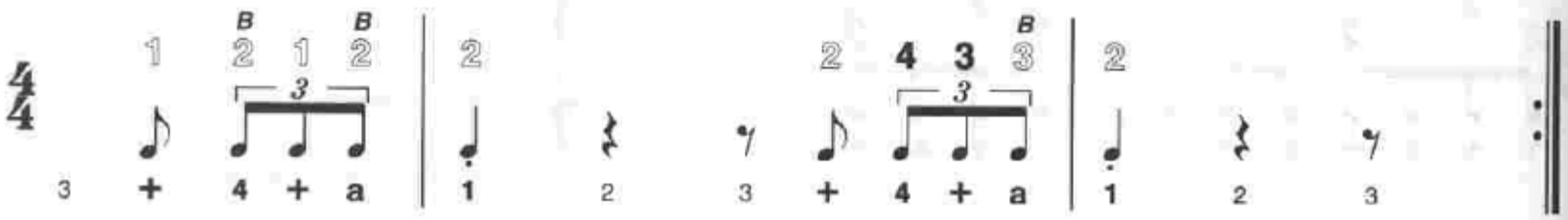
47.

This riff makes use of the 2 bend, but this time you will need to land directly on the bent note instead of hearing the natural 2 pitch first. This may take some time to master, but produces a great sound so keep at it. This riff uses a common Blues technique known as **call and response**, which as a question and answer style of playing either between two instruments or an instrument and vocal.



48.

Here is a common variation on the previous riff, this time using the half step bend on hole 3.

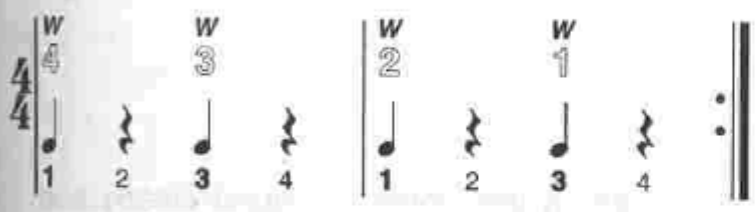


Lesson 7

Grace Notes

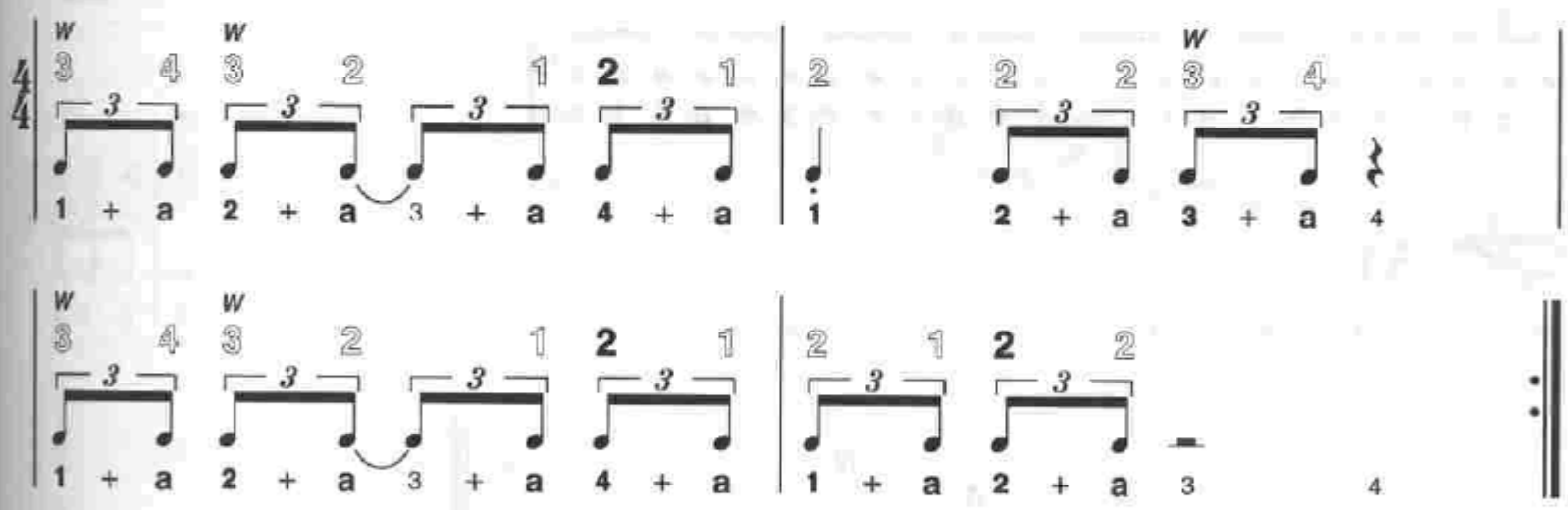
Sometimes, instead of holding a note for its full value, you can start on a note (e.g. a bent note) and immediately move to another note. These very quick notes are called grace notes. Bent grace notes can be thought of as a **wah** sound produced by the mouth. The "**w**" is the grace note and the "**ah**" is the following note held for its usual length of time. Bent grace notes are indicated in the notation by the letter ***W*** above the note to which it applies.

49.

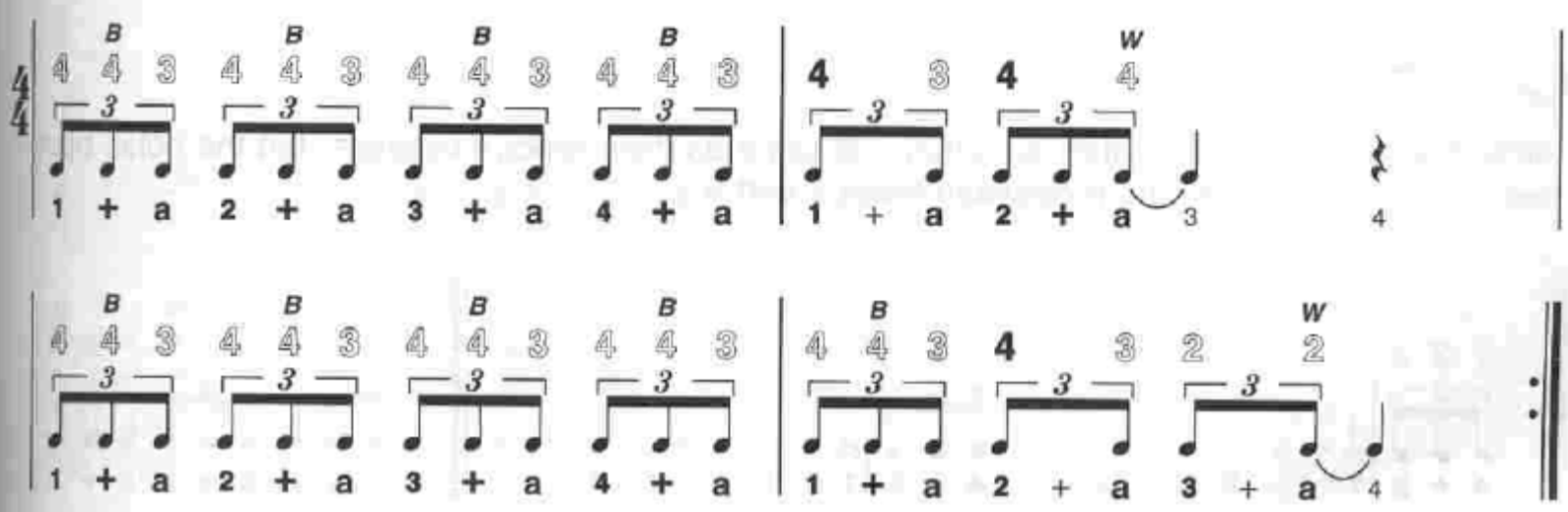


50.

Here are some licks which make use of grace notes. Take them slowly at first and try to memorize each one.



51.



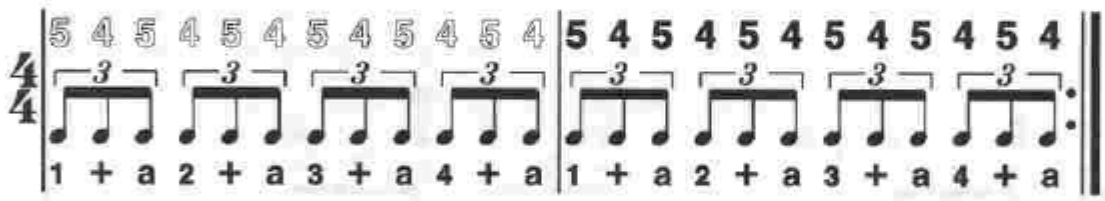
The Trill

Another exciting sound often played on the harmonica is the **trill**. A trill is a rapid alternation between two inhaled notes or two exhaled notes. This can be achieved either by rapidly moving the harmonica from side to side while maintaining a steady breath, or by rolling the head from side to side while holding the harmonica steady. Both these methods are common in harmonica playing. A trill is indicated by two holes (eg $\frac{5}{4}$) with the symbol *tr* written above them.

52.

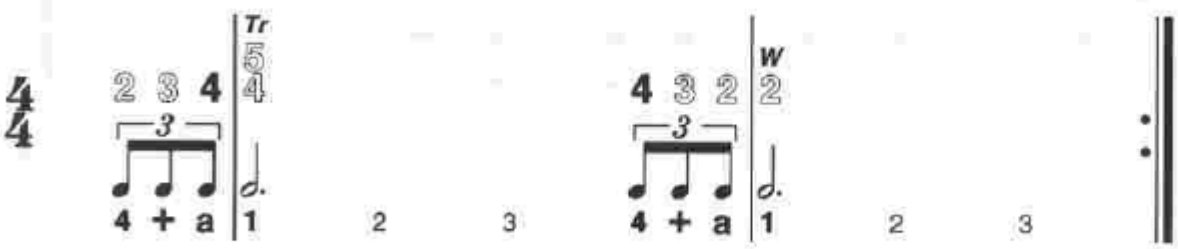
When you begin learning the trill, you may have trouble getting the notes to sound clearly and evenly. Here is an exercise which should help. Take it slowly at first.

53.



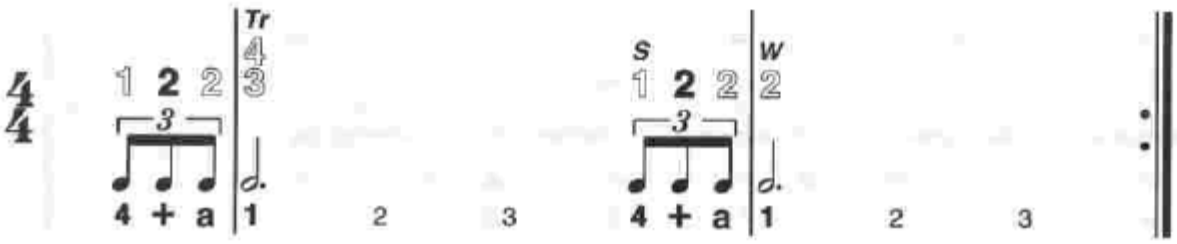
54.

Here is a typical Blues lick using the trill on holes 4 and 5.



55.

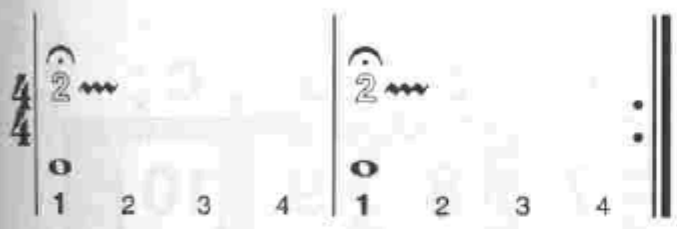
Here is a variation. The rhythm is exactly the same as the previous example, but the notes have been changed. The trill here is between holes 3 and 4.



Throat Vibrato

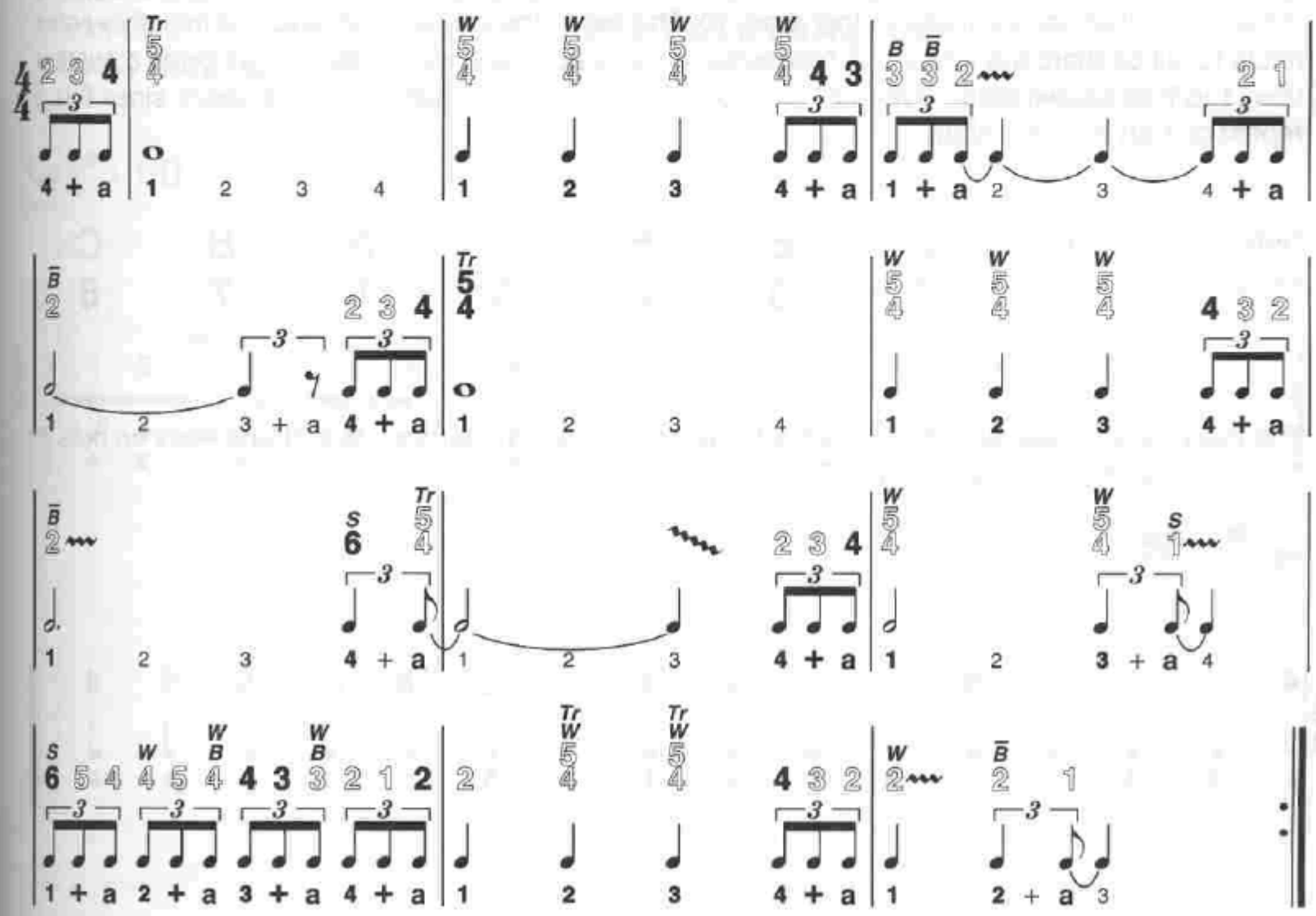
Another sound commonly used by harmonica players is **throat vibrato**. This is another way of adding expression to a note once it has sounded. The sound is made with a similar movement to both laughing and coughing. Try saying ha ha ha ha very quickly as you breath in. Then try it breathing out. Then try the same thing as you play a note on the harmonica. Listen to the CD to hear the effect produced by throat vibrato. Like note bending, this technique can take some time to master, so be patient and stick with it. Throat vibrato is indicated by the symbol placed after the hole number.

56.



To finish off this section, here is a 12 bar Blues solo which makes use of all the techniques you have learnt. Take it slowly at first and listen carefully to the CD to get all the expressions. Once you can play this one, you are well on the way to being a good Blues player.

57. Tell it Like it is



Lesson 8

Notes on the C Harmonica

The following diagram shows the names of all of the notes used in the book. There are technically a few more possible notes you could find on the C harmonica, particularly by bending the higher exhale notes, but these have been omitted to keep the diagram as simple as possible. The symbol ♭ beside some of the notes is a **flat sign**. Flat means a lower pitch. By using these signs it is possible to indicate pitches halfway between letter names, e.g. the note **D♭** is halfway between the notes **C** and **D**.

Exhale	C	E	G	C	E	G	C	E	G	C
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Inhale	D	G	B	D	F	A	B	D	F	A
Bend	D♭	F	B♭ or A	D♭	E	A♭				

If you wish to study harmonica playing seriously, it is worth taking some time to memorize the names of the notes on the harmonica along with their **scale degrees** which measure the distance of each note from the key note (in this case, **C**). The **key** is the central note which all the other notes relate to. Since there are seven different notes in the major scale, each note can be given a number from 1 to 7 as shown below. When the number 8 is reached, the pattern begins again, since 8 is a repeat of 1 an octave higher.

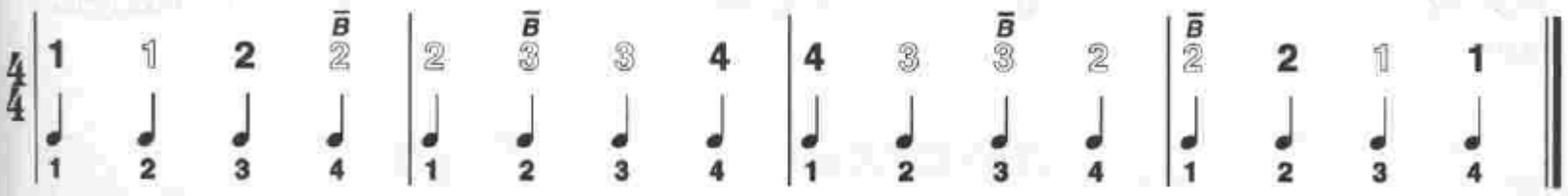
Note Name	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Scale Degree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

The following example demonstrates the C major scale which starts on hole **4** and ends on hole **7**. This scale is used more in Folk and Country music than in Blues.

58.

Once you know how to bend notes, it is possible to play a lower octave of the C major scale starting on hole **1**. This example demonstrates the low octave without bends and then the full scale with bends. This is a great exercise for gaining control of note bending. As you play this scale, listen carefully to the pitch of each of the bent notes to make sure they are in tune.

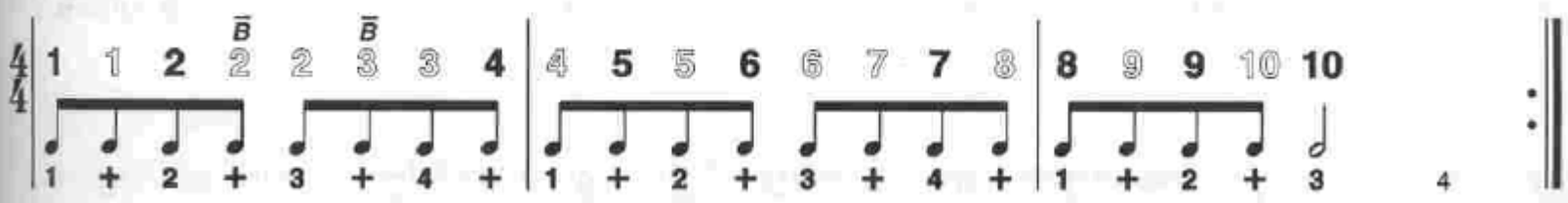
59.



Complete Range of the Harmonica

If you try playing the highest octave of the C major scale starting on hole **7**, you will find that the note **B** (the **7th** degree) is missing, so you get C (1), D (2), E (3), F (4), G (5), A (6) C (8). The following example contains three octaves of the C major scale (apart from the missing B note), which is the complete range of the C harmonica. **All** ten hole diatonic harmonicas have a range of 3 octaves regardless of what key they are tuned to. When you play in the key written on the harmonica (in this case **C**) instead of cross harp, you are playing in **first position**. As you learnt in lesson 2, **cross harp** is often referred to as **second position**.

60.



Analyzing Cross Harp Sounds

When you play cross harp on the C harmonica, you are playing in the key of **G**. This means that all the scale degrees for cross harp playing relate to the note G instead of C. To play the G major scale, the note **F sharp** is required. Just as a flat lowers the pitch of a note, a sharp (♯) raises the pitch of a note. This means that the note **F♯** is halfway between F and G. The note F♯ is not available on the C harmonica, which means the G major scale cannot be played on the C harmonica. However, the cross harp position is normally used for more bluesy sounds which do not use the major scale but do contain a **flattened 7th** degree. By flattening the 7th degree of the major scale, the **mixolydian** scale or mode is produced. A comparison of the G major scale and the G mixolydian scale is shown below.

G Major Scale

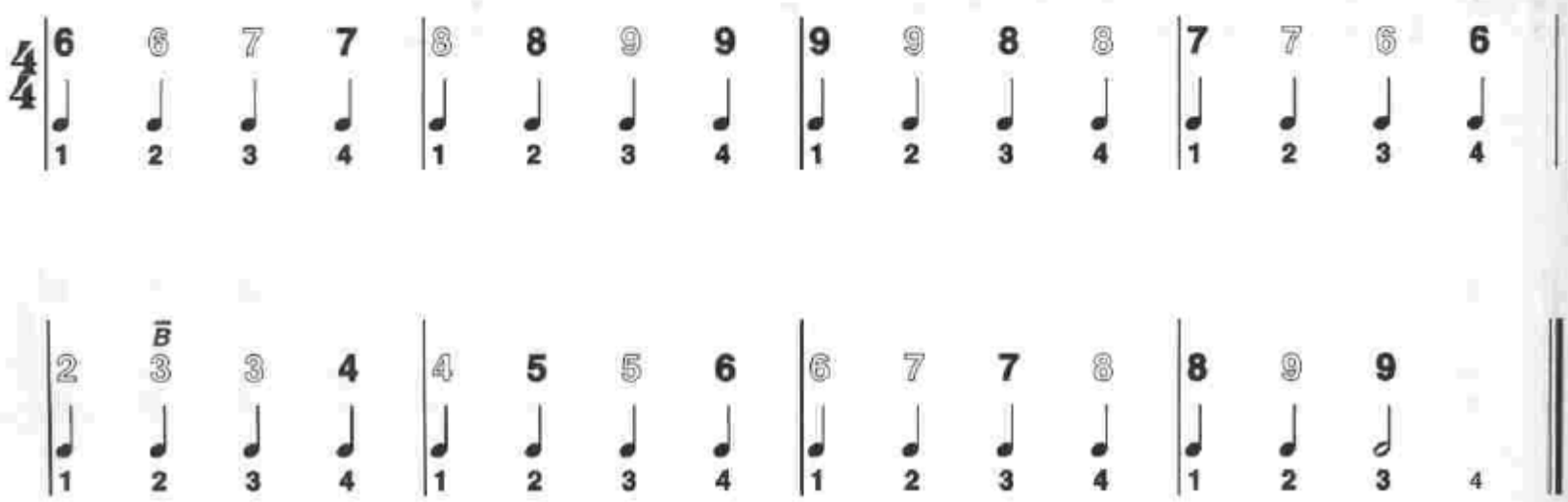
G	A	B	C	D	E	F♯	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

G Mixolydian Scale

G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	♭7	8

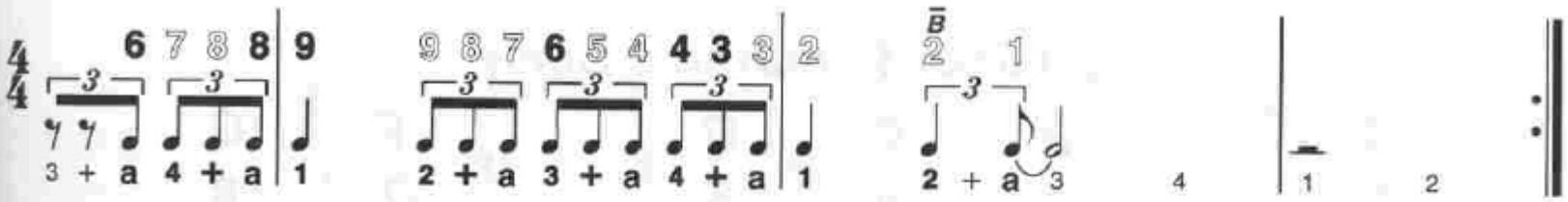
61.

Here is the G mixolydian scale played first in the middle octave and then over two octaves. Notice the slightly mournful sound produced by the ♭7 degree. This is one of the sounds that makes cross harp so effective for Blues playing. As you play this example, mentally name the scale degrees, remembering that G is the keynote instead of C. The note G can be found at holes 2, **3**, **6**, and **9**.



62.

Here is a lick which makes use of the G mixolydian scale. Try making up some of your own.



The Major Pentatonic Scale

By leaving out the **4th** and **7th** degrees of either a major scale or a mixolydian scale, the **major pentatonic** scale is created. As the name suggests, pentatonic scales contain only **five** different notes. There are many melodies, particularly in folk and gospel music which are derived from the major pentatonic scale. Shown below is a comparison of the G mixolydian scale and the G major pentatonic scale.

G Mixolydian

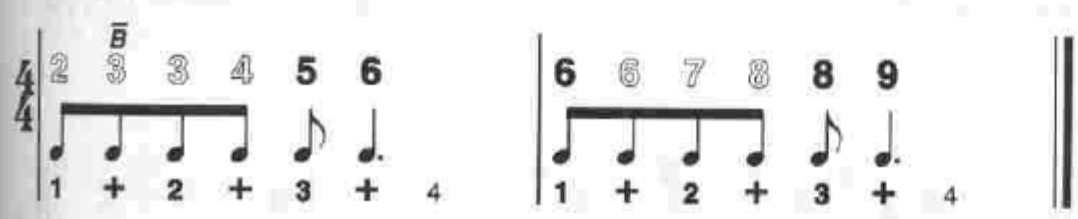
G	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	2	3	4	5	6	♭7	8

G Major Pentatonic

G	A	B	D	E	G
1	2	3	5	6	8

63.

Here is the G major pentatonic scale played over two octaves. Once again, mentally name the scale degrees as you play. Do this until you know which degree you are on as soon as you play it.



The Minor Pentatonic Scale

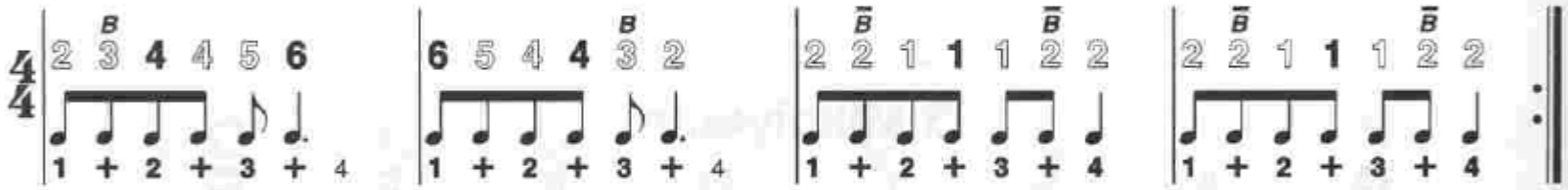
There are **two** different types of pentatonic scale, the major pentatonic and the **minor pentatonic** which is shown below. As well as the flattened 7th degree, the minor pentatonic also contains a **flattened 3rd** degree. The the scale degrees of the minor pentatonic scale are **1**, **♭3**, **4**, **5** and **♭7**.

G Minor Pentatonic Scale

G	B♭	C	D	F	G
1	3	4	5	♭7	8

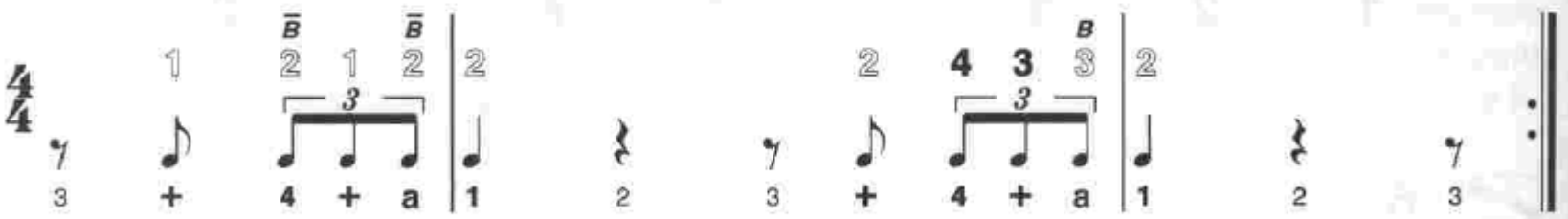
64.

Because of the way the harmonica is tuned, it is only possible to play the cross harp minor pentatonic scale on the low end of the harmonica. The scale is shown in the following example starting on hole 2 and finishing on hole **6**, along with part of the scale on the very low notes down as far as the 4th degree (**C**).



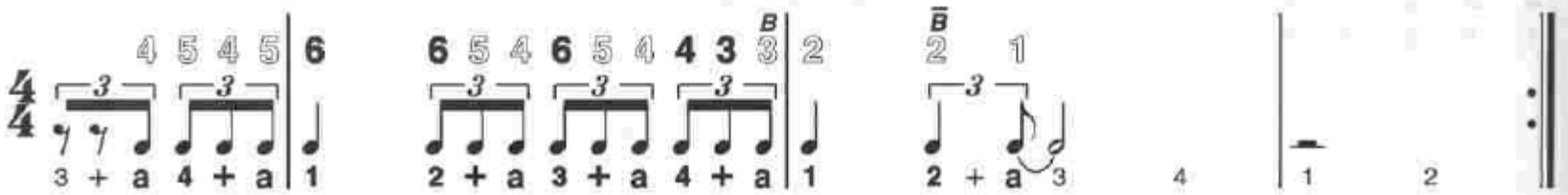
65.

Here is a riff you learnt in lesson 6 which is derived from the minor pentatonic scale. As you can hear, this scale is great for creating Blues sounds. It is also the most common scale used in Rock.



66.

Here is another lick which is derived from the minor pentatonic scale. Try making up some of your own licks from this scale.



The Blues Scale

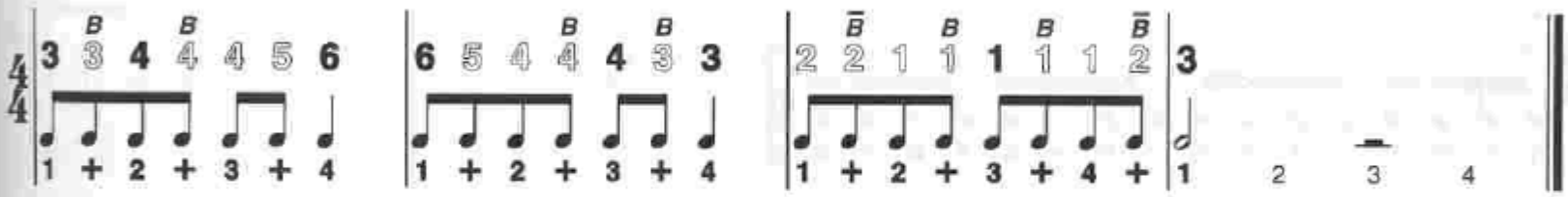
By adding one extra note (the flattened fifth degree) to the minor pentatonic scale, the Blues scale is created. This scale is used by all instrumentalists to create Blues melodies.

G Blues Scale

G	B♭	C	D♭	D	F	G
1	♭3	4	♭5	5	♭7	8

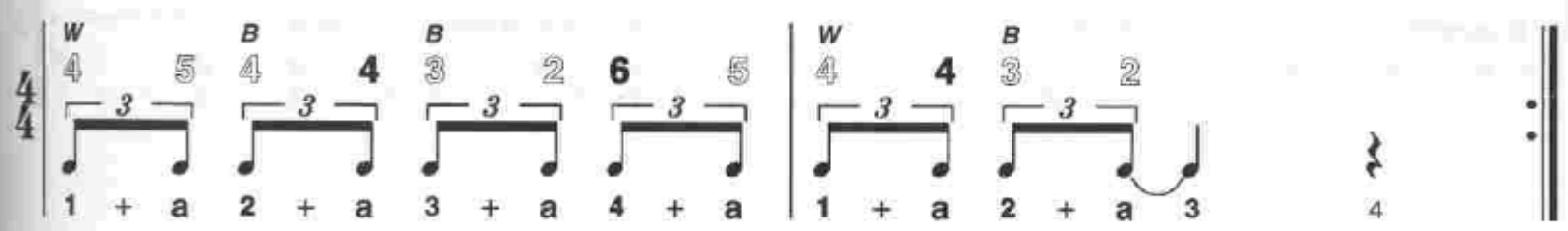
67.

Like the minor pentatonic scale, the cross harp Blues scale can only be played on the low end of the harmonica. The G Blues scale is shown here along with a partial lower octave of the scale down as far as the 4th degree (**C**).



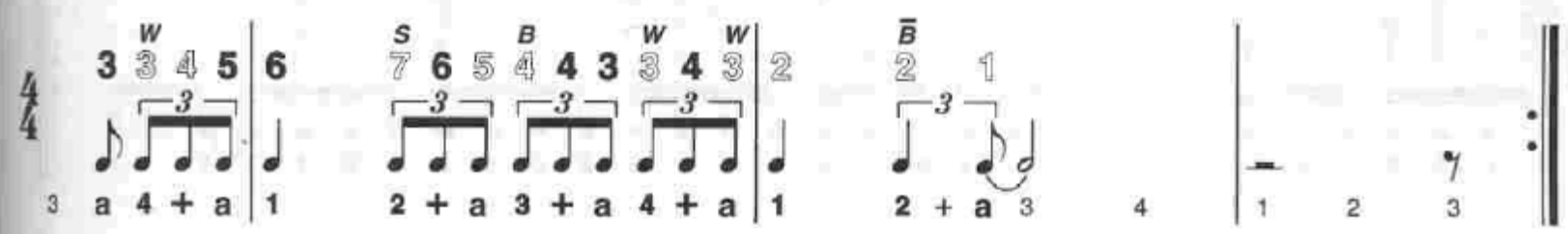
68.

Here is a lick derived from the G Blues scale.



69.

When improvising, it is common to use notes from all of the scales you have learnt. The following lick is made from a combination of the G mixolydian scale and the G Blues scale.



Lesson 9

Sixteenth Notes

This is a **sixteenth note**.
It lasts for **one quarter** of a beat.
There are **four** sixteenth notes in one beat.
There are **16** sixteenth notes in one bar of $\frac{4}{4}$ time.

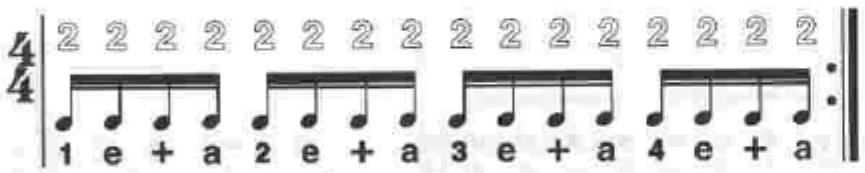
Four sixteenth notes joined together.

Count: 1 e + a

Say: one 'ee' and 'ah'

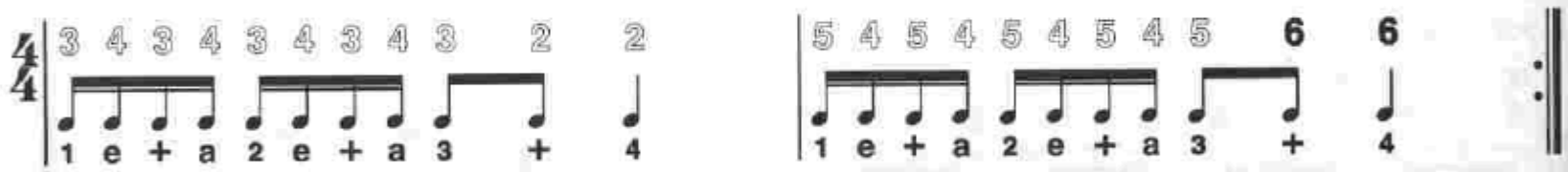
70.

Tap your foot on each beat and count mentally as you play.



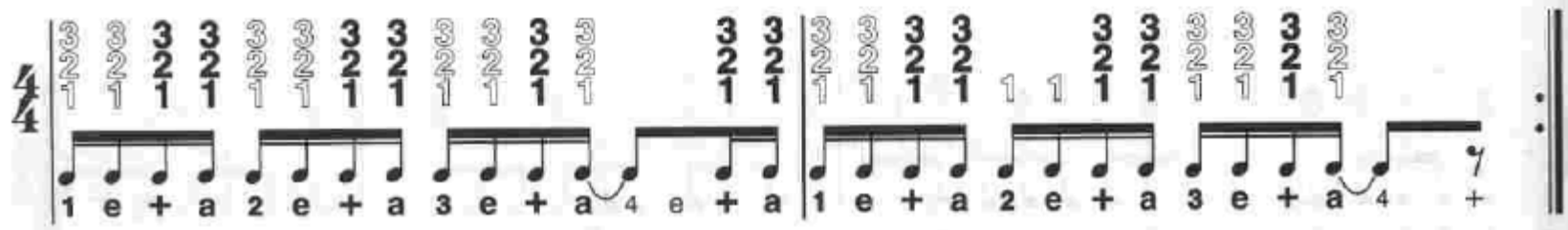
71.

Now try this example which contains sixteenth notes moving between two different notes.



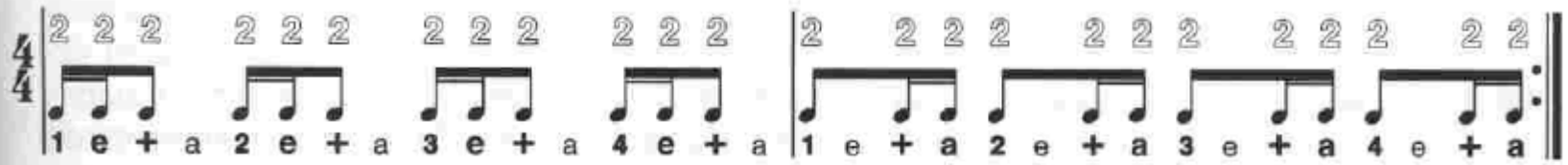
72.

Sixteenth notes are great for playing train rhythms, as demonstrated in the following example. Take this one slowly at first and tap your foot on each beat to help you keep time.



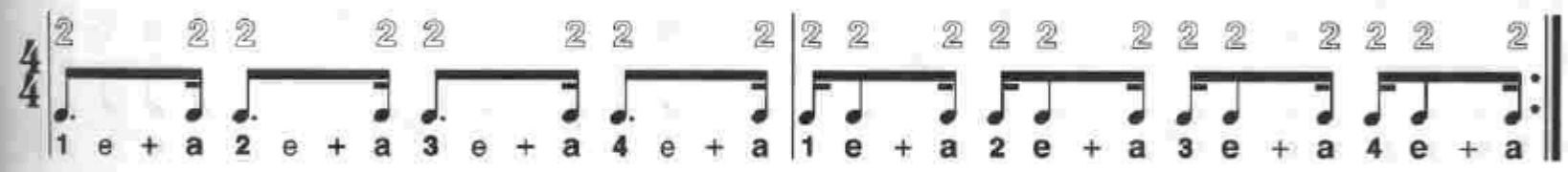
73.

Often in songs you will find two sixteenth notes grouped together with an eighth note as demonstrated in this example. All of the following rhythms are worth memorizing.



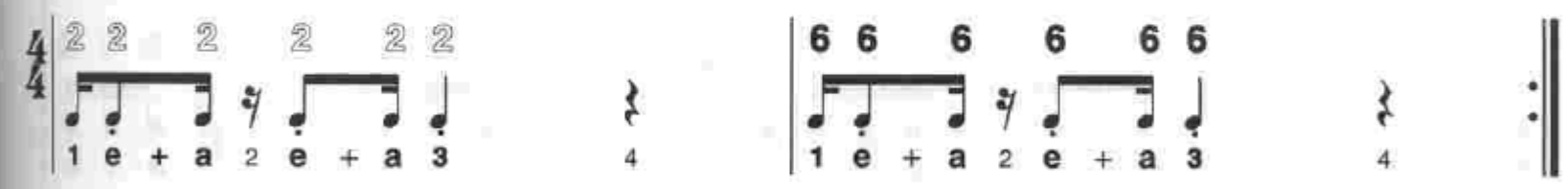
74.

Here are two more common rhythm figures involving the use of sixteenth notes.



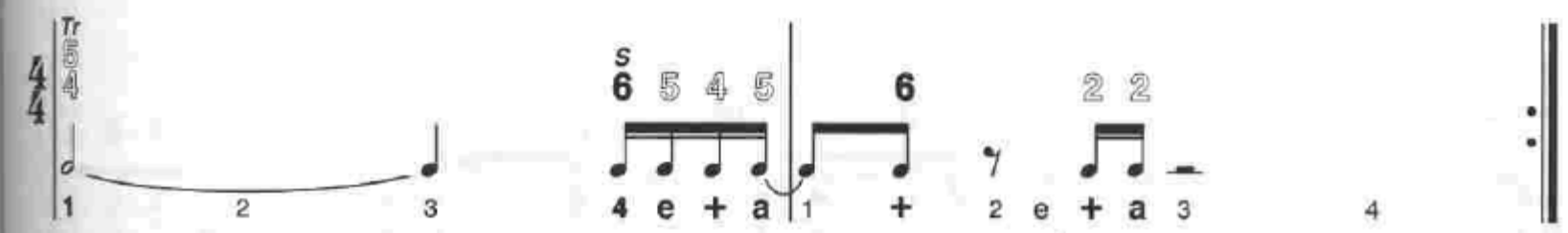
75.

One of the ways these rhythms can be used is to imitate horn section parts, particularly when playing R&B and Funk.



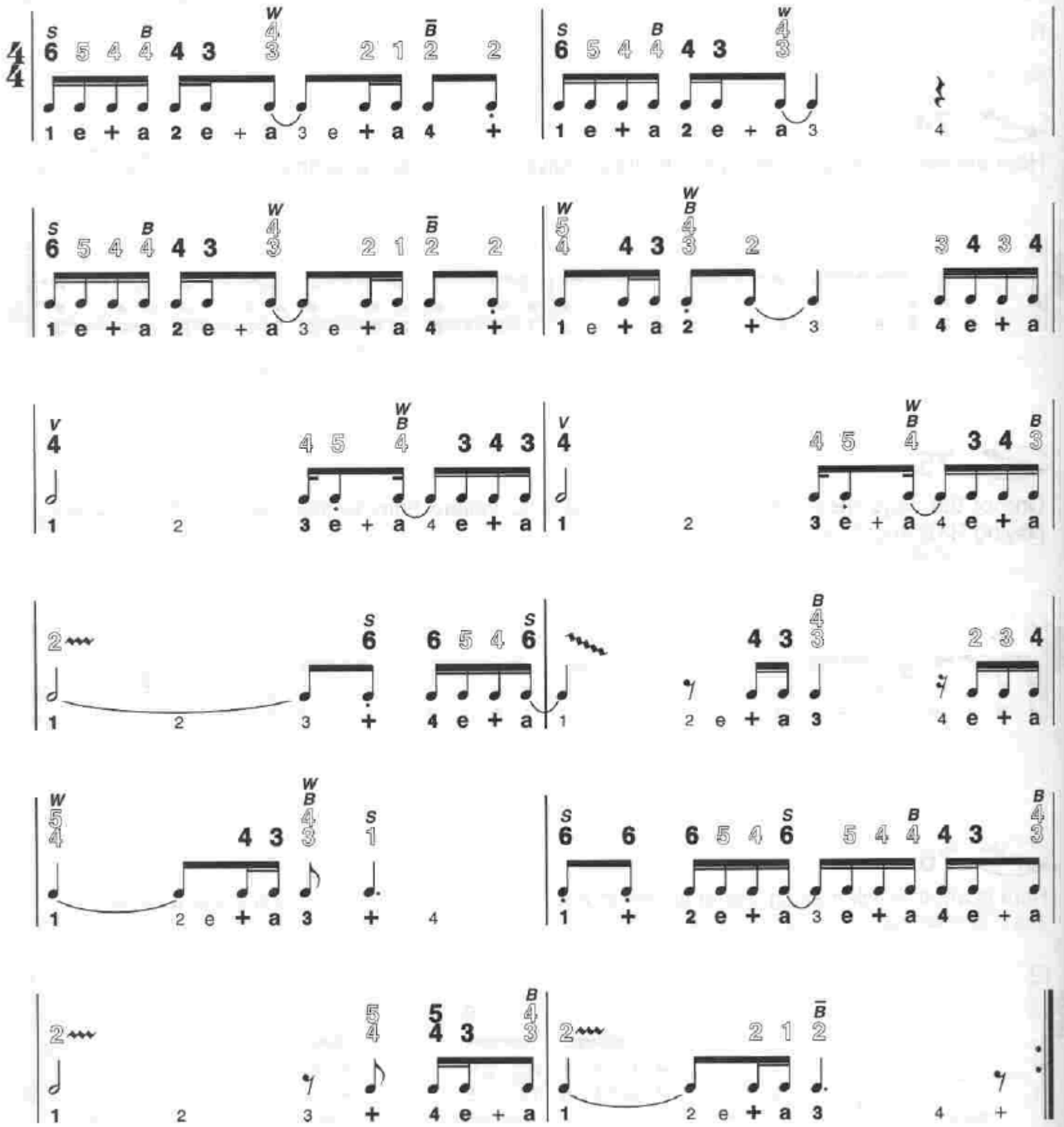
76.

Here is another lick making use of sixteenth notes. This one also features a trill and a slide.



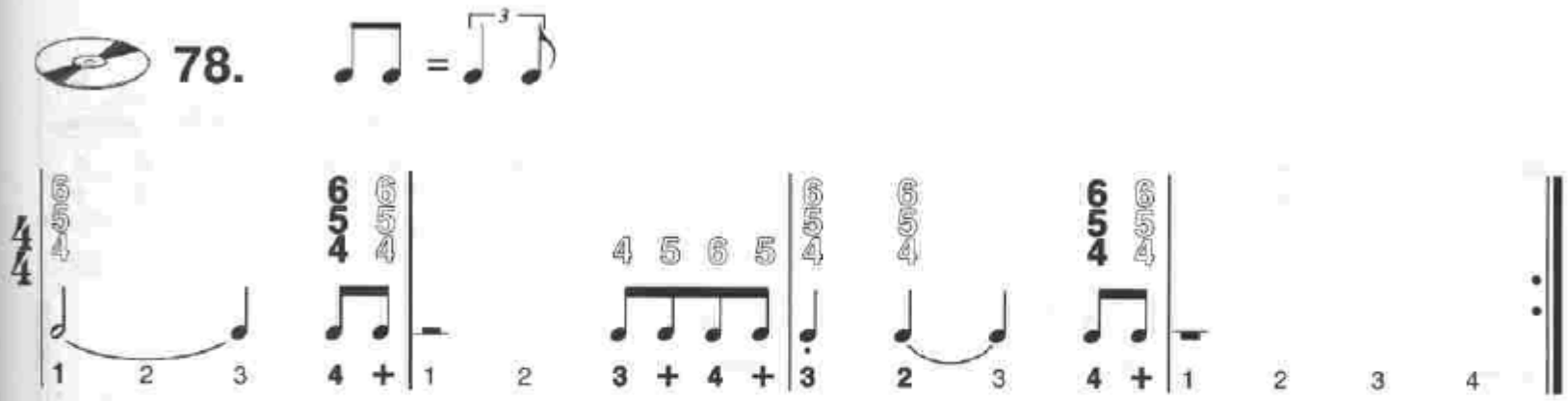
77. Twistin' and Turnin'

Here is a solo which is based on sixteenth notes. Take your time with this one, as it may be difficult at first. Listen to the CD to hear the timing and all the expressions. As suggested earlier, clap any rhythms you have trouble with while counting out loud and tapping your foot on each beat.



Third Position

So far, almost everything you have learnt has been in second position (cross harp). It is also possible to play in another key on the harmonica in what is known as **third position**. This sound is often associated with **minor keys**. On the **C harmonica**, third position can be used to play in the key of **D minor**. The key note for third position can be found at holes 1, 4 and 8 (a D note). It is important to memorize where these notes are as soon as possible. The following example demonstrates a chordal riff played in third position.

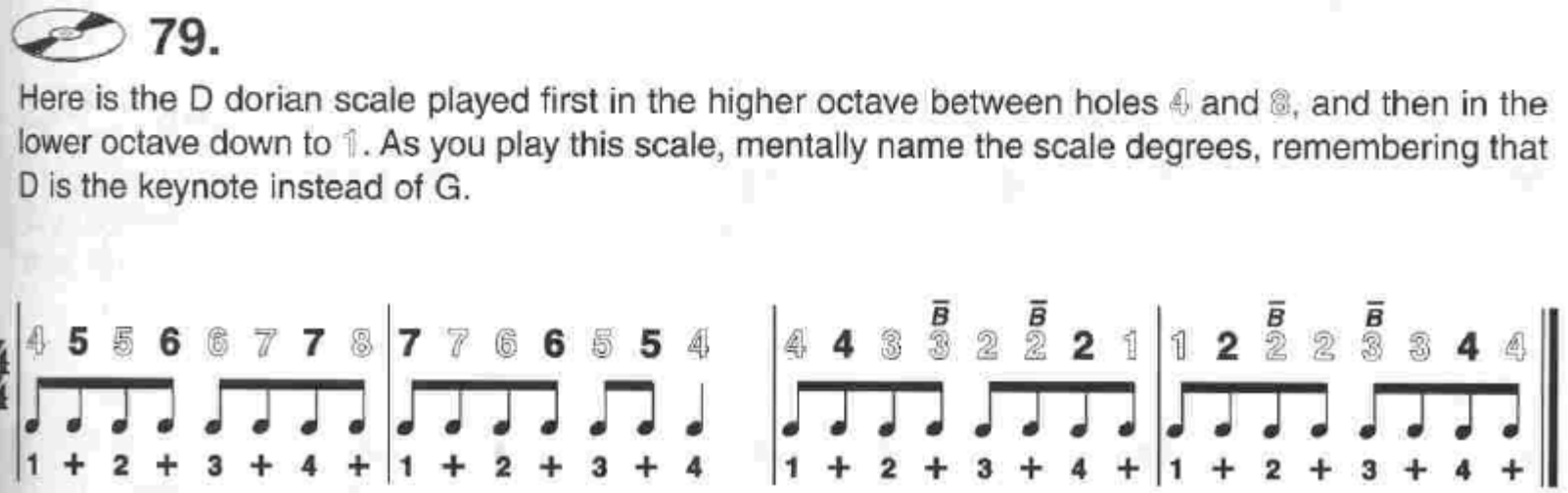


The Dorian Scale

A useful scale for playing in the third position is the Dorian scale or mode. Its degrees are **1**, **2**, **♭3**, **4**, **5**, **6** and **♭7**. It is shown below as the D dorian scale, which can be played on the C harmonica.

D Dorian Scale

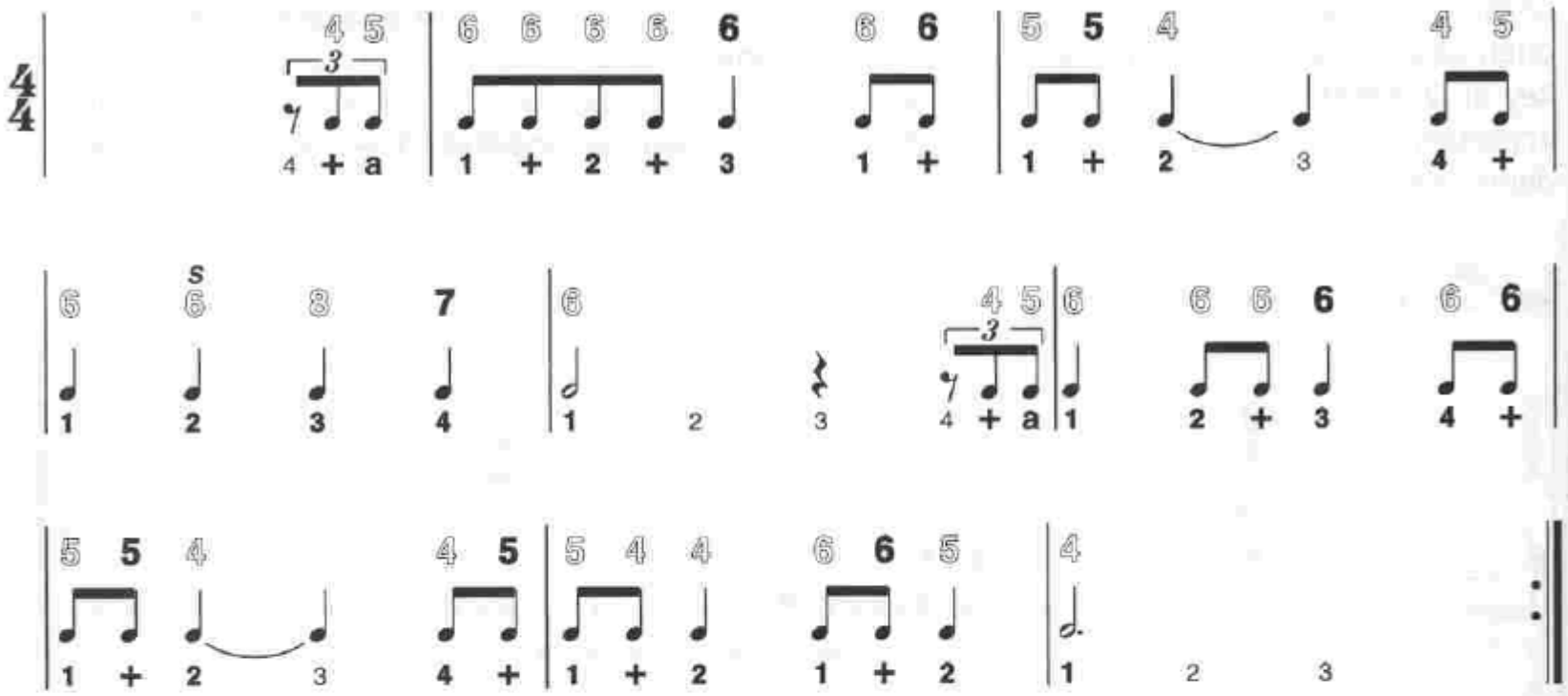
D	E	F	G	A	B	C	D
1	2	♭3	4	5	6	♭7	8



Here is the D dorian scale played first in the higher octave between holes 4 and 8, and then in the lower octave down to 1. As you play this scale, mentally name the scale degrees, remembering that D is the keynote instead of G.

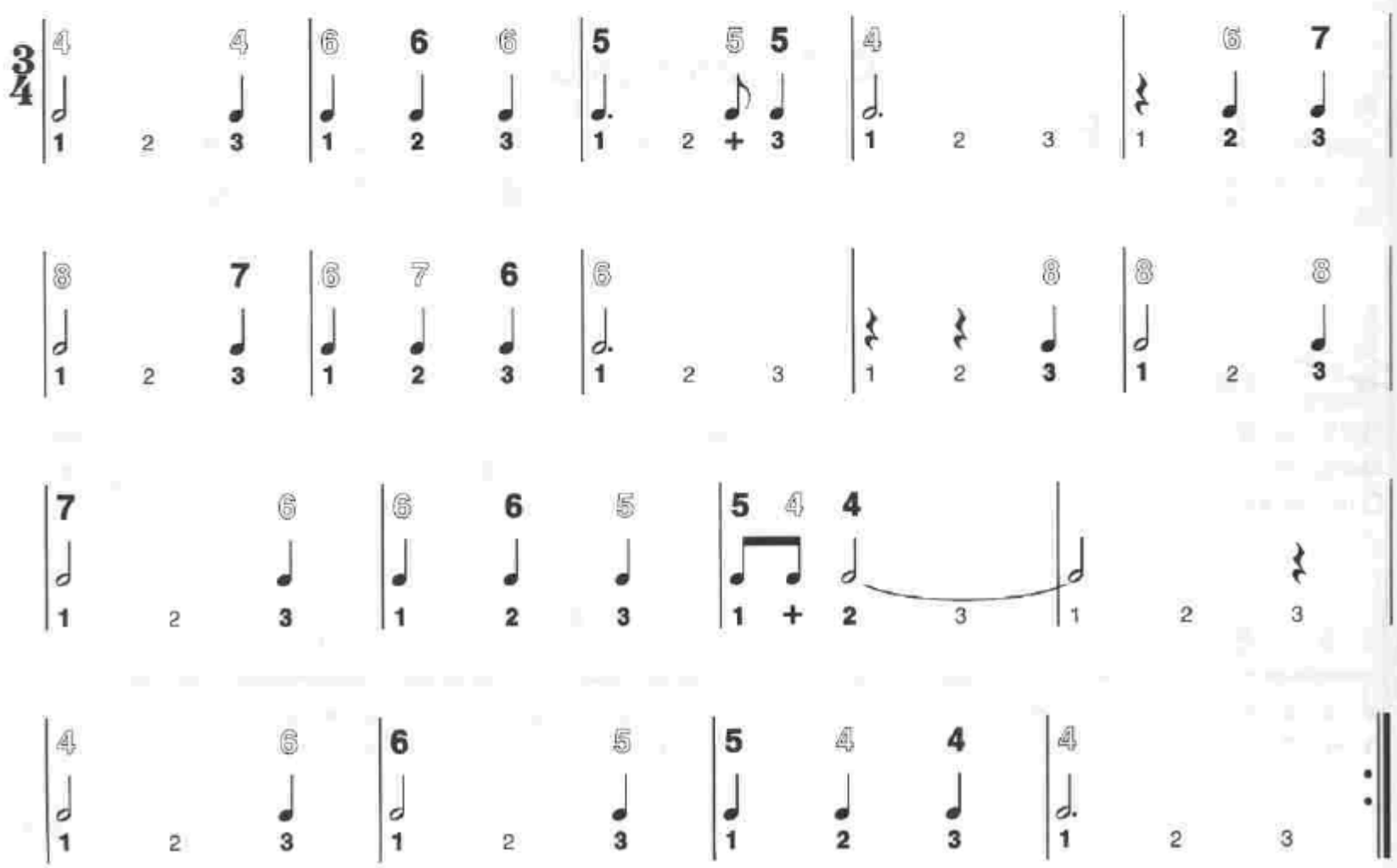
Written below are two traditional songs played in the third position. Both of them are derived from the dorian scale.

80. St James Infirmary



81. Scarborough Fair

Notice that this one is written in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. This means there are only **three** beats per bar instead of four. For an introduction to $\frac{3}{4}$ time, see *10 Easy Lessons for Harmonica*.



The Blues Scale in Third Position

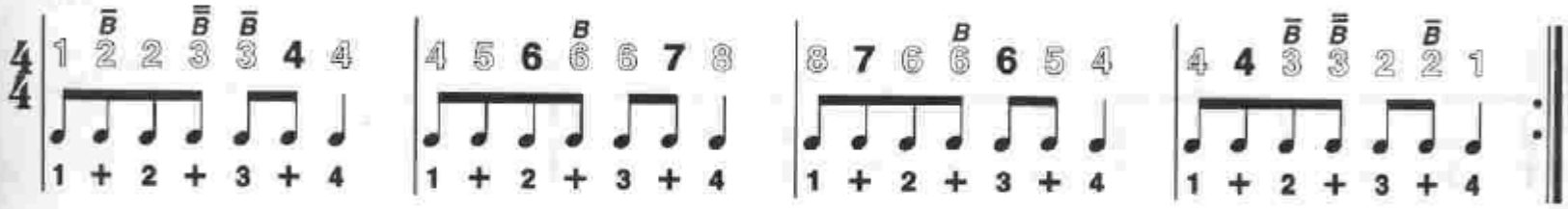
Written below are the notes of the **D** Blues scale which can be played in third position on a C harmonica.

D Blues Scale

D	F♭	G	A♭	A	C	D
1	♭3	4	♭5	5	♭7	8

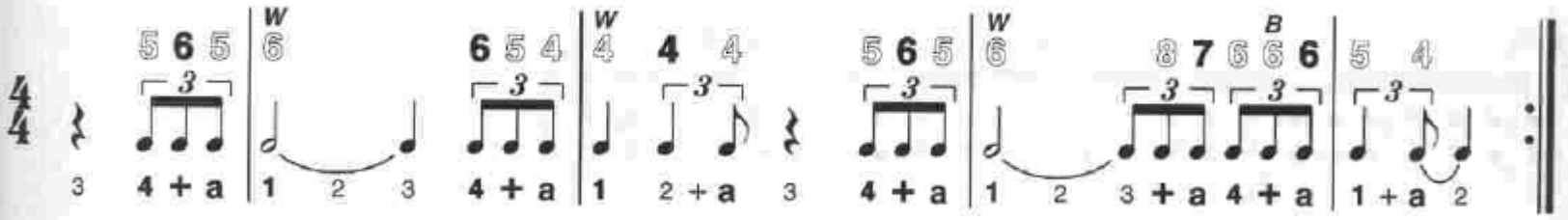
82.

Here is the D Blues scale played over two octaves. As with earlier scales, name the degrees mentally as you play, and try to memorize the scale. This will make things easier when it comes to creating licks from the scale.



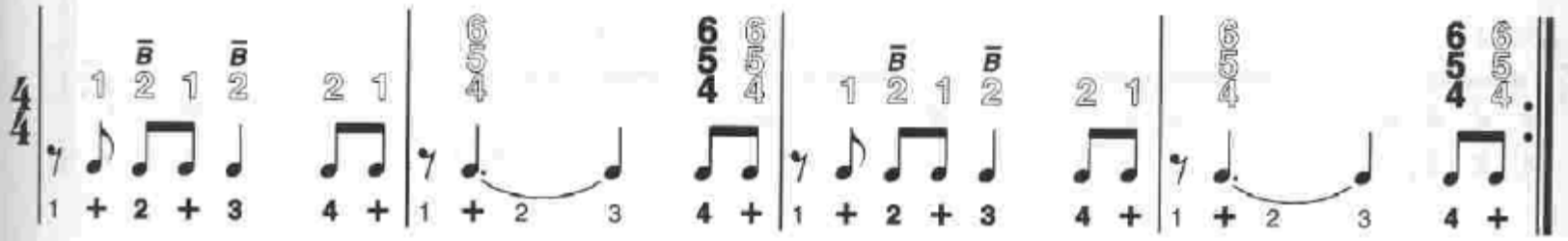
83.

Here is a lick derived from the third position Blues scale.



84.

This one is a combination of a single note riff and a chord riff played in a call and response style. Try making up some of your own licks from the dorian scale and the Blues scale. The more you do this, the easier it will become.



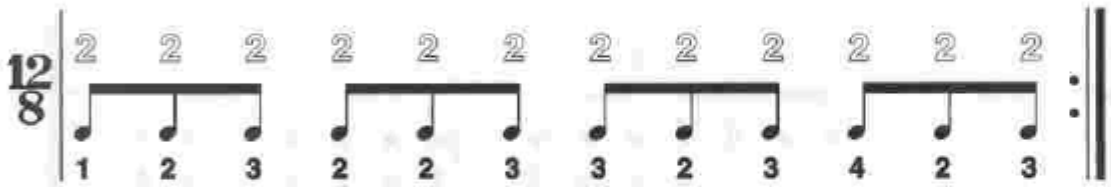
Lesson 10

The Twelve Eight Time Signature

This time signature is called the **twelve eight** time signature. It tells you there are **twelve eighth note beats** in each bar.

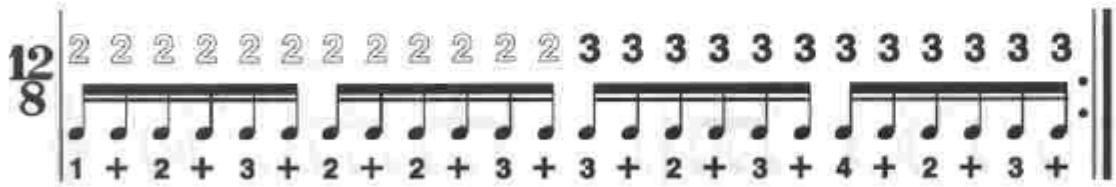
A bar of eighth notes in twelve eight time sounds the same as a bar of triplets in four four time. Although there are twelve individual beats which can be counted, twelve eight time is usually still counted in four as demonstrated in the following example.

85.



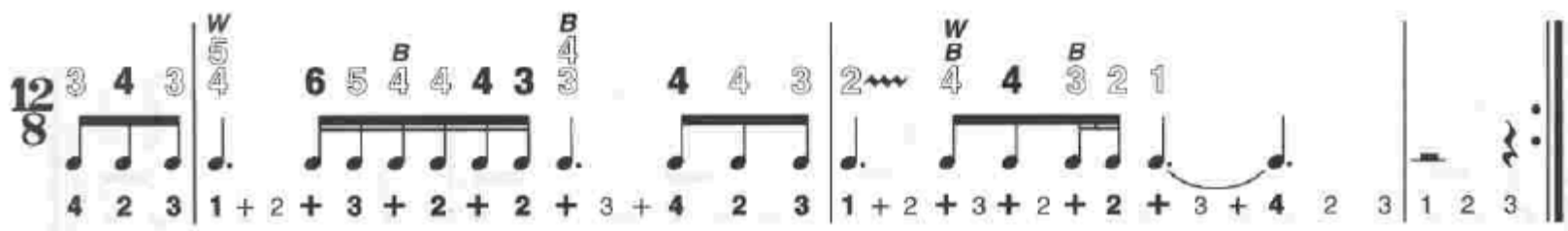
86.

The beats can also be subdivided into sixteenth notes as shown below. Be careful with the counting.



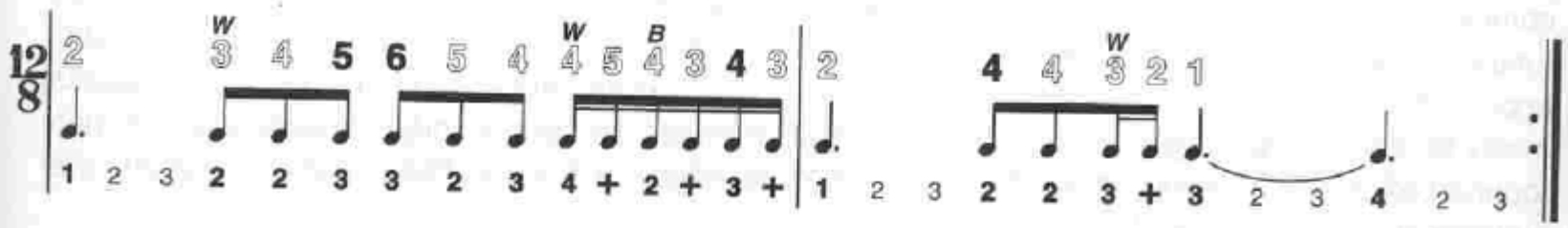
87.

Here is a Blues lick in $\frac{12}{8}$ time which makes use of sixteenth notes



88.

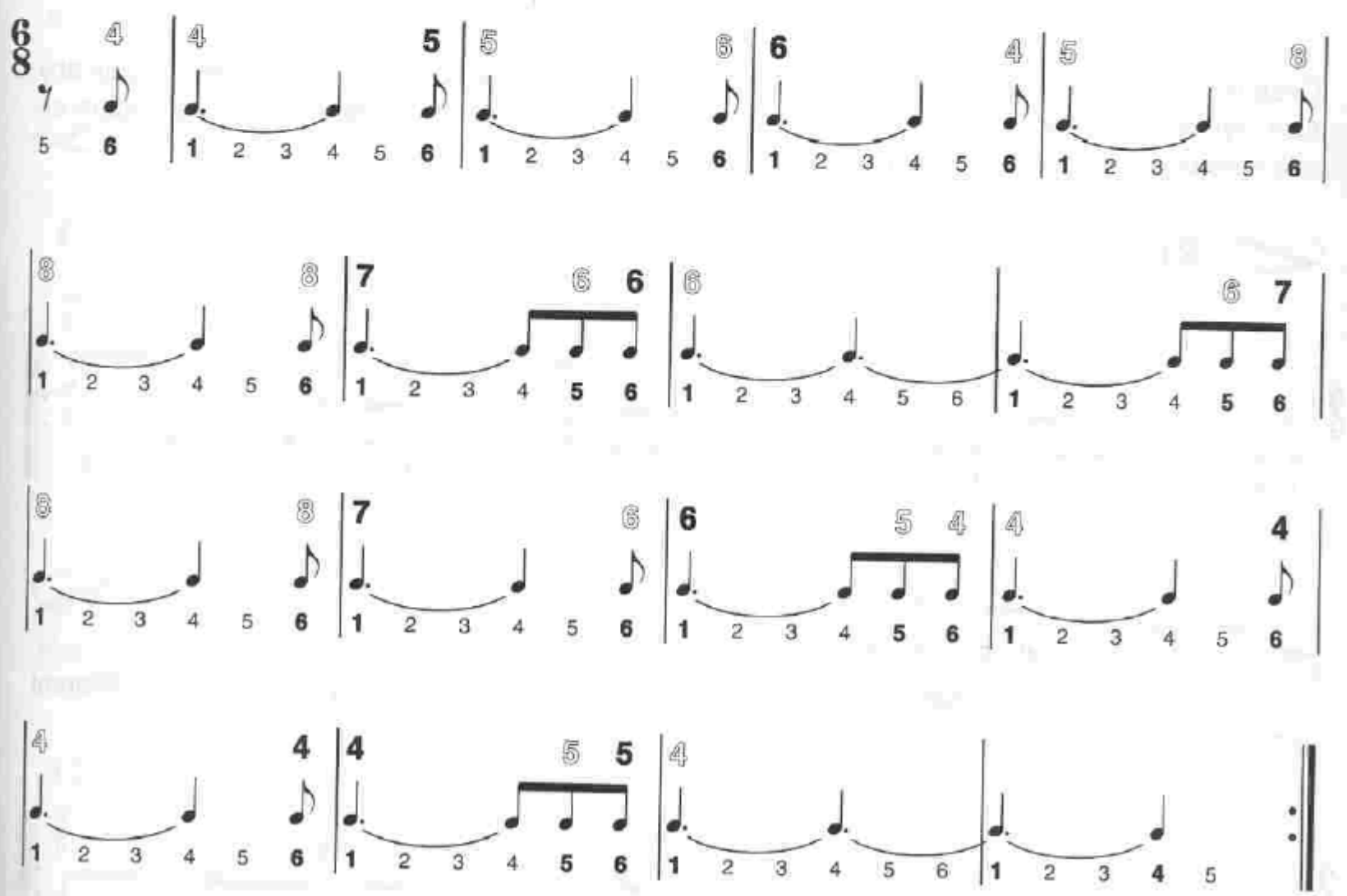
It is also possible to swing 16th notes as shown in the following lick.



The Six Eight Time Signature ($\frac{6}{8}$)

Another useful time signature based on eighth notes is six eight time, which tells you there are six eighth note beats in each bar. Six eight time is counted **1 2 3 4 5 6, 1 2 3 4 5 6** etc. The following example demonstrates the song House of the Rising Sun played in third position in $\frac{6}{8}$ time.

89. House of the Rising Sun

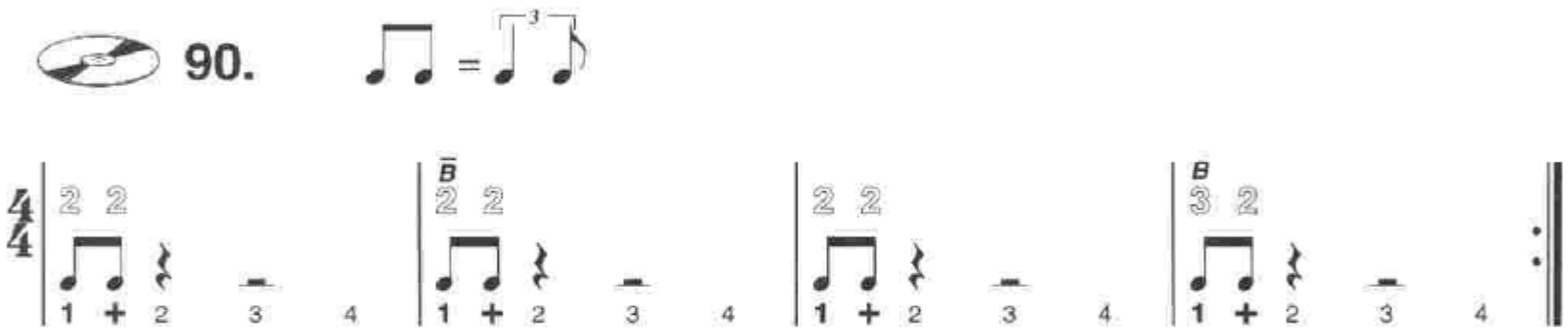


Improvisation

Improvisation means creating your own melodies by ear. You now know more than enough to begin improvising. Although some licks and melodies are derived entirely from one scale, it is also common that notes from a combination of scales is used. Most musicians create new melodies totally by ear, drawing on all the sounds they are familiar with. When you are learning, the best approach is to learn all the sounds and scales but also to experiment with making up your own licks totally by ear. Composing is usually done by intuition based on subconscious knowledge and then rounded off with fine tuning based on conscious knowledge, i.e. the creating is done by ear and the theoretical analysis comes later.

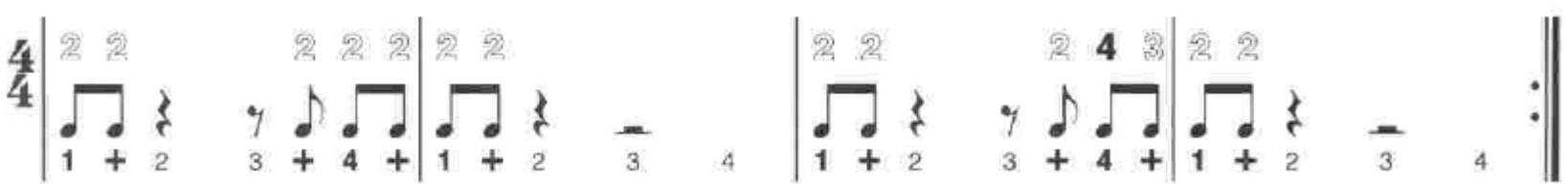
A good way to begin improvising is to use a short rhythm pattern (e.g. two swung eighth notes) and move it between different notes to create variations. This is demonstrated in the following example.

90.



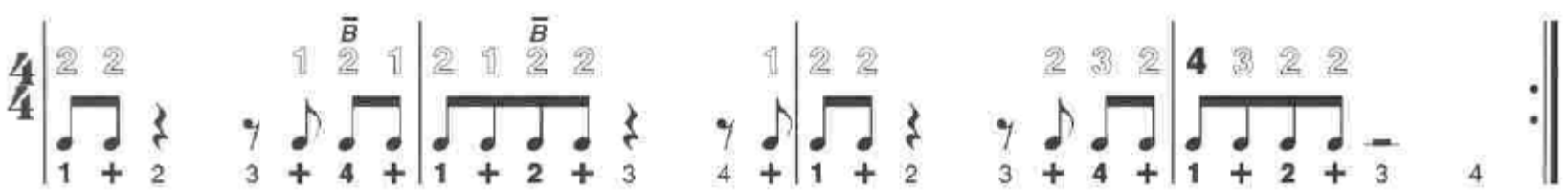
Once you are comfortable with this, try using a longer rhythm pattern. It is a good idea to play any new rhythm on one note until you have it memorized. This next example demonstrates a rhythm on one note and then on a variety of pitches.

91.



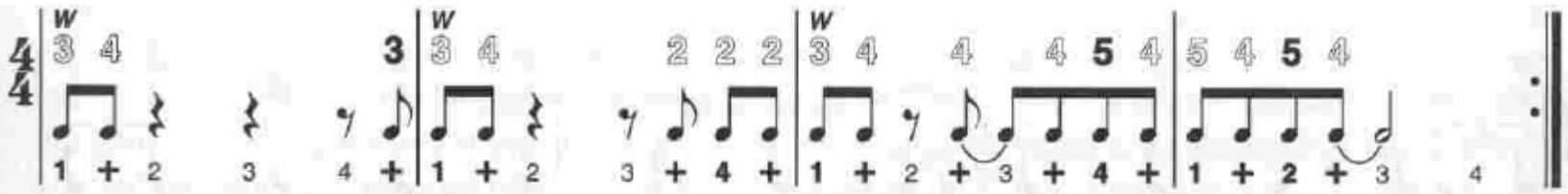
92.

Here is another variation using a set rhythm pattern. Notice the way using the rhythm on different groups of notes creates a call and response effect between the phrases.



Another useful improvising technique is to begin with a short rhythmic phrase and then add longer variations, each one adding something to what has gone before.

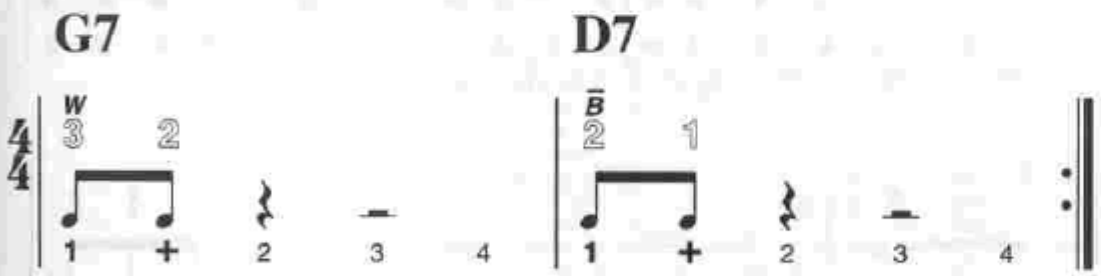
93.



The Turnaround

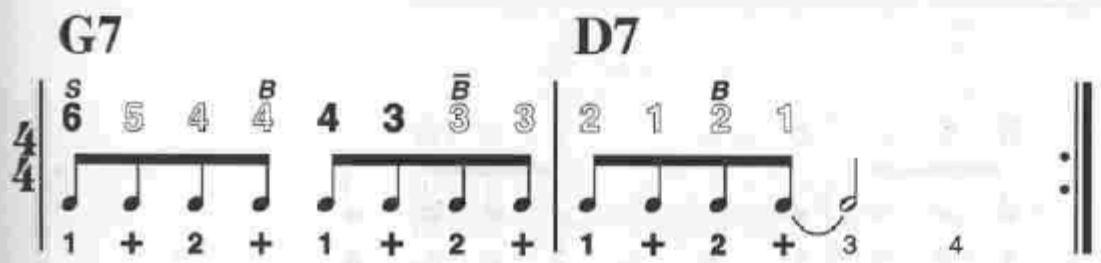
In most Blues songs, each verse ends with what is called a **turnaround.** A turnaround is a way of setting the music up for a repeat, so that the listener is ready for the next verse or solo. Turnarounds commonly occur on the last two bars of the Blues progression. The chords found in the turnaround are usually I and V. In the key of G the chords used in these two bars would be G or G7 and D or D7. Although you can use any of the notes of the Blues scale or a combination of scales to play over all the chords of a Blues progression, it is common to change some of the notes along with the chord changes, e.g. ending the phrase on the root note of the accompanying chord as shown in the following example, or using mostly notes contained in the chord. This is particularly important on the turnaround of a verse or solo. The first bar here is played over a G7 chord, so the harmonica plays the notes B and G which are both part of a G7 chord. In the second bar, the accompaniment plays a D7 chord and the harmonica plays an F from the G Blues scale and ends on a D note which is the root note of the D7 chord. Listen to how well these notes fit with the accompaniment.

94.



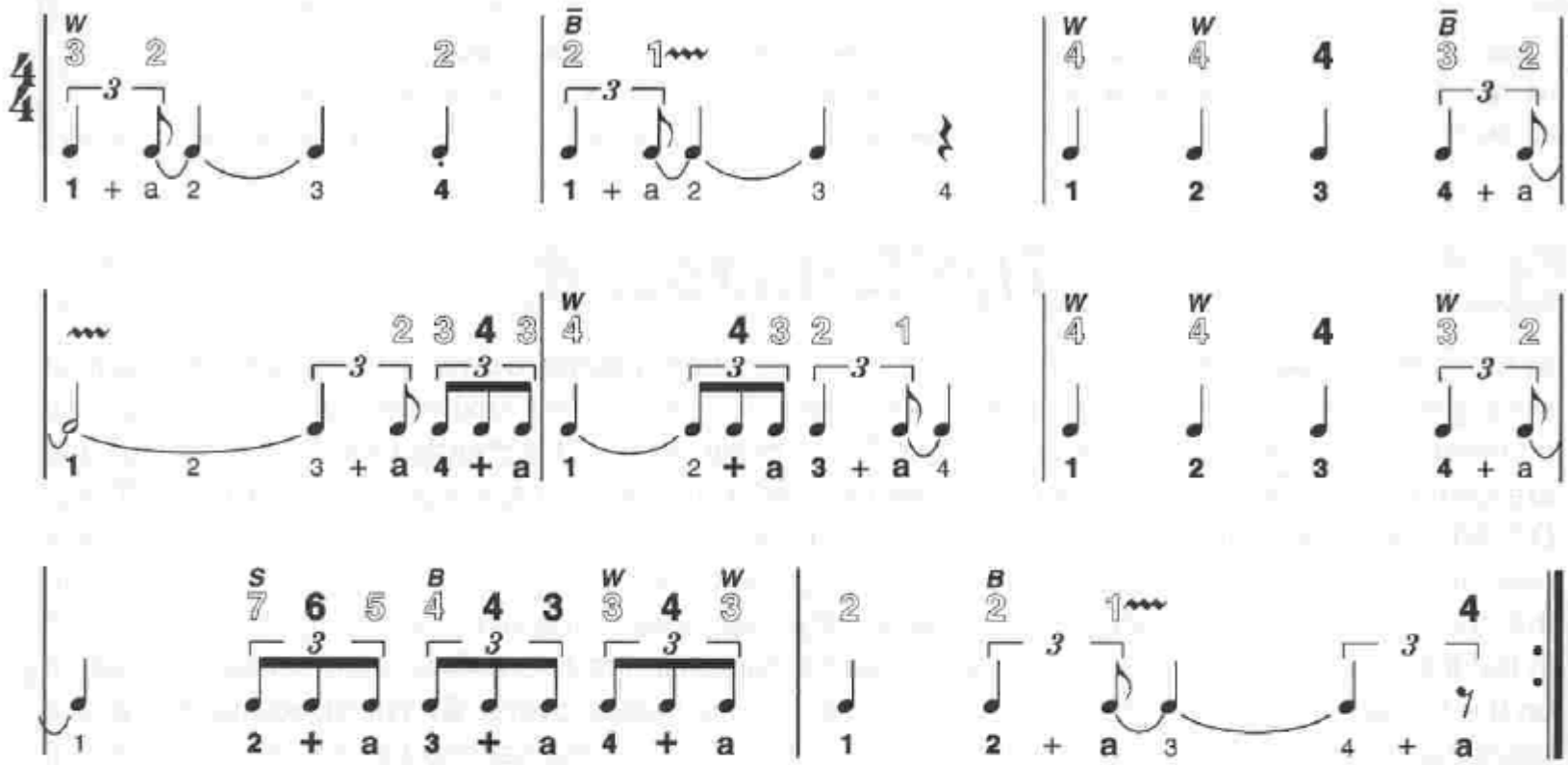
95.

Here is a typical example of the type of lick you might find on a Blues turnaround. Try making up some of your own, as well as listening to Blues albums for ideas to use on turnarounds.

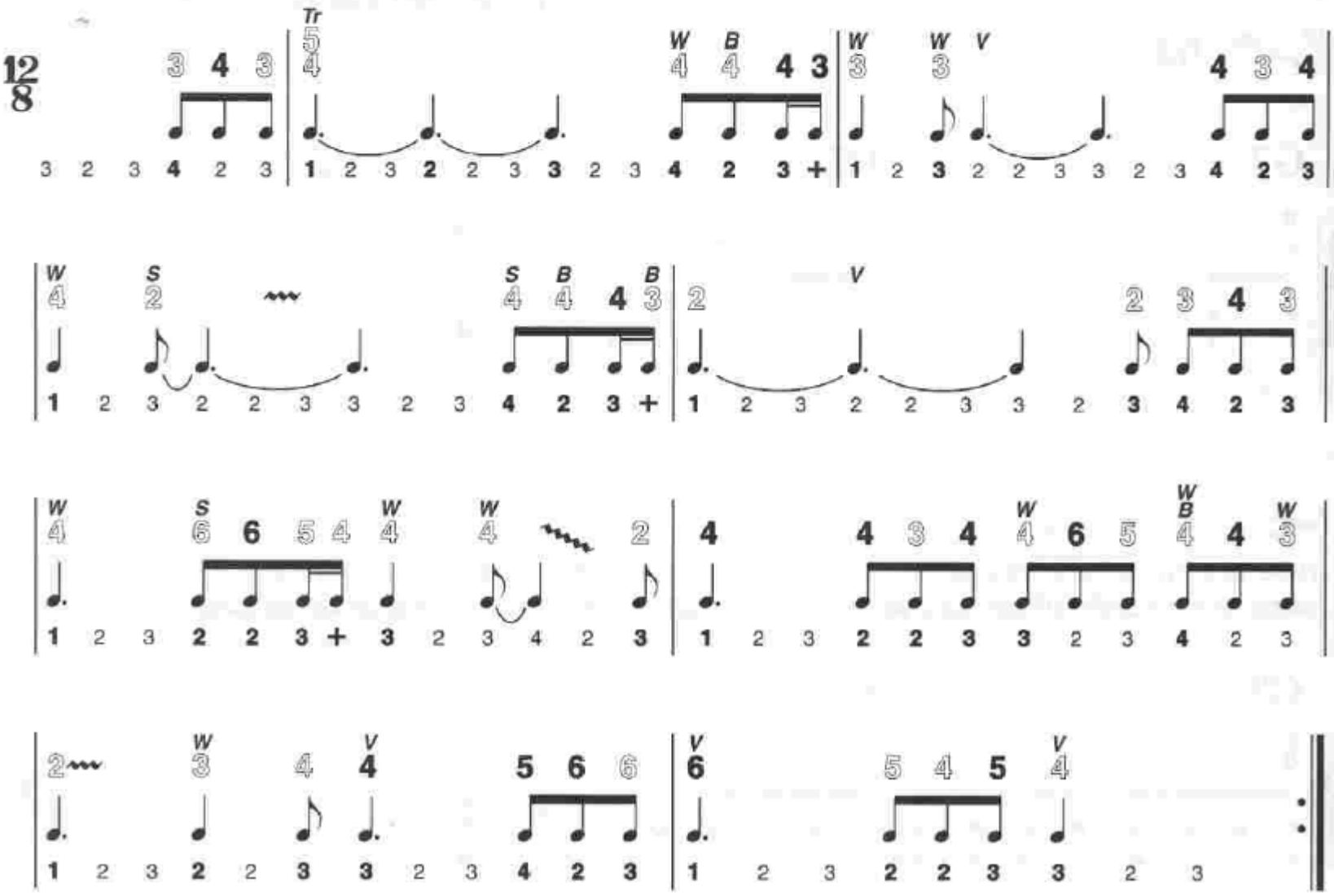


To sum things up, here are two Blues solos making use of almost all of the techniques you have learned in the book. The first one is in $\frac{4}{4}$ time and the second one is in $\frac{12}{8}$. Another interesting feature of these solos is that they use 8 bar forms instead of 12 bars. Listen to Blues albums and see if you can find some more examples of 8 bar Blues.

96. Ridin' the Line



97. Coming Home Blues



Playing in Other Keys

In this book you have learnt to play in two keys – G in second position and D minor in third position. However, many times when you play with other musicians or play along with your favorite albums, other keys will be used. Once you are comfortable playing the C harmonica it is a good idea to get a few others in different keys. The playing techniques are identical regardless of the key you are playing in, only the actual pitch of the notes changes. This means that once you can play a song on the C harmonica, you can transfer it directly to any other harmonica and play the same holes with the same breathing and it will sound just as good. If you are playing an **A harmonica** in first position, you will be playing in the **key of A major**. If you are playing a **D harmonica** in first position, you will be playing in the **key of D major**. This means that if you are playing with a guitarist for example, you can easily find the correct key for many songs simply by choosing the harmonica with that key written on it.

For cross harp playing however, it can sometimes be confusing trying to find the right harmonica to fit with what the other musicians are playing. In this situation it becomes more important to know the sounds on the harmonica as scale degrees. E.g. if a guitarist is playing a **Blues in E** (a common key for Blues), you would use an **A harmonica** to play cross harp in second position. The notes found at holes 2, **3, 6** and **9** would all be **E notes on the A harmonica**. If you know that the notes at these holes are the first degree of any scale in the cross harp position, this makes it easier to understand why the A harmonica is the one chosen for a Blues in E. If you used any other key harmonica, the notes at these holes would not be E and the harmonica would not work for a Blues in E. The following chart lists all the keys used in music along with the correct harmonica for playing second position cross harp with each key. The easiest way to check if you are using the right harmonica for the key is to play holes 2, **3**, or **6** and see if it is the same note as the key you want by testing it against a guitar or keyboard chord. If the guitar plays a **D chord**, your note should be a **D note**, If the guitar plays an **F chord**, your note should be an **F note**, etc. You can usually tell by ear if you have the correct note or not.

Second Position Chart

Guitar Key	Harmonica Key
C	F
G	C
D	G
A	D
E	A
B	E
F♯	B
D♭	G♭
A♭	D♭
E♭	A♭
B♭	E♭
F	B♭

When playing in third position, it is more common to play in a minor key. However, third position will also work for a standard Blues which uses seventh chords (e.g. G7, D7, etc.).
This means that the guitar key shown in the chart below (e.g. **C**) could be either the key of C or the key of C minor. G could represent the key of G or the key of G minor, etc. To choose the correct harmonica to play in third position, you will need to use a harmonica which is named one whole tone (two semitones) down from the guitar or keyboard key (e.g. for the key of C you would use a B harmonica, for the key of G you would use an F harmonica, etc.). The more you play with other musicians, the easier it gets to pick the right harmonica for the musical situation.

Third Position Chart

Guitar Key	Harmonica Key
C	B♭
G	F
D	C
A	G
E	D
B	A
F♯	E
D♭	B
A♭	G♭
E♭	D♭
B♭	A♭
F	E♭

Cleaning the Harmonica

If you play a harmonica regularly, it will need cleaning after a while to keep the holes and the airways under the reeds clear and in good working order. The best way is to soak the harmonica in a bowl of warm water. Turn the harmonica over and shake it several times while fully submerged to remove any air trapped inside it. Leave the harmonica soaking for about an hour, and then alternately shake it and dip it in the water several more times. Also, use a small implement to clear out any unwanted matter if necessary. The next step is to run the harmonica under a cold tap several times and shake it and then tap it on a semi hard surface to clear the water out. Finally you should try exhaling and inhaling through all of the holes until you are confident they all sound properly. If not, shake and tap the harmonica some more until all of the water comes out.

Harmonicas with a plastic body respond better to cleaning than the wooden bodied type, as the wood will often swell and can cut your mouth when sliding between notes.

Understanding Chords

As mentioned in lesson 2, a chord is a group of 3 or more notes played simultaneously. Different types of chords can be formed by using different combinations of notes. The most common type of chord is the **major chord**. All major chords contain three notes, taken from the major scale of the same letter name. These three notes are the 1 (first), 3 (third) and 5 (fifth) degrees of the major scale, so the **chord formula** for the major chord is:

1 3 5

Chord Symbol

C

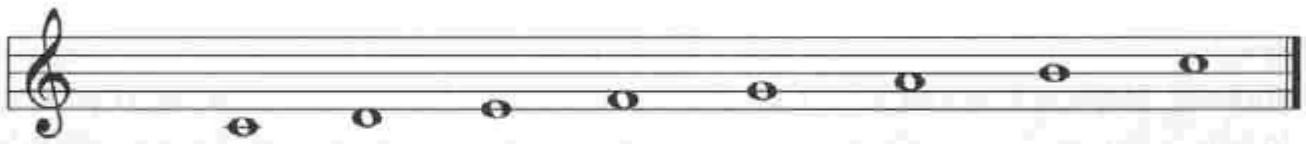
The C Major Chord

Notes in Chord

C	E	G
1	3	5

The C major chord is constructed from the C major scale. Using the above chord formula on the C major scale below, it can be seen that the C major chord contains the notes **C**, **E** and **G**.

C Major Scale



Note Name	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
Note Number	**1**	2	**3**	4	**5**	6	7	8
C Major Chord	**C**		**E**		**G**			

Once you have the correct notes for a C chord, you can double each of the notes as many times as you like. As long as the notes are still C, E and G, you still have a C chord. E.g. if you exhale through the harmonica and run your mouth from the bottom to the top of the instrument (holes 1 to 10) you produce a giant C chord covering three octaves, because **all** of the exhale notes on the C harmonica are either C, E or G.

Chords can be played more easily on some instruments than others. Two of the most common instruments used for chord playing are the guitar and the keyboard. Like the harmonica, it is possible to double (or even triple) the notes of a chord on these instruments. As long as you play the correct notes for any chord, they can be arranged in any order, e.g. a C chord could be played C E G, or E G C, or G C E, or even G E C. This is one of the reasons why chords may sound different when played on different instruments.

Melody and Harmony

During the course of this book you have learnt to play songs using both chords and single notes. Any line played in single notes is called a **melody**. Any other accompanying notes such as chords are called **harmony**. There are many ways in which melody and harmony are used in music. One of the most common combinations is to have one instrument play the melody (e.g. harmonica) and another instrument play the harmony (e.g. guitar). When you play a song using chords on the harmonica, usually you are playing a combination of melody and harmony at the same time.

Different Types of Chords

Apart from starting a chord on the first degree of the scale, it is also possible to build chords on all the other notes of the major scale. A chord built on the second degree of the major scale would contain the 2nd, 4th and 6th notes of the scale. A chord built on the third degree of the scale would contain the 3rd, 5th and 7th notes of the scale,etc. The chord building pattern always consists of the root note (original note), the note two ahead of that note, and the note two ahead of that note, e.g. **C E G**, **D F A**, **E G B**, etc.

If you build chords on the first, fourth and fifth degrees of the major scale, you end up with chords I, IV and V which are the most common chords used for playing the Blues. Because of the pattern of tones and semitones in the major scale, not all the notes in these chords are comparatively the same distances apart. These different distances result in different types of chords such as minor chords and diminished chords. By adding more notes to the chords it is possible to create other chord types such as 7ths, 9ths and 13ths. It is beyond the scope of this book to deal with all these chord types individually but if you are interested in how chords work, it is probably worth learning a bit of guitar or keyboard. This can also be beneficial in that you can quickly communicate with other musicians by understanding the terms they are using.

Another major benefit of learning an instrument like guitar or keyboard is that you can accompany yourself. Many solo Blues and Folk performers use a harmonica rack worn around the neck in order to play guitar and harmonica at the same time. This method is great for your coordination and greatly increases your knowledge of the way notes and chords work together. Apart from this, its a lot of fun and means you are not dependent on other people to make music with. To learn more about chords, chord progressions and keys, see *Progressive Blues Rhythm Guitar Method*, *Progressive Blues Keyboard Method* or *Progressive Rock Keyboard Method*. For easy reference for playing Blues in any key, here is a chart showing the basic chords I, IV and V in all keys.

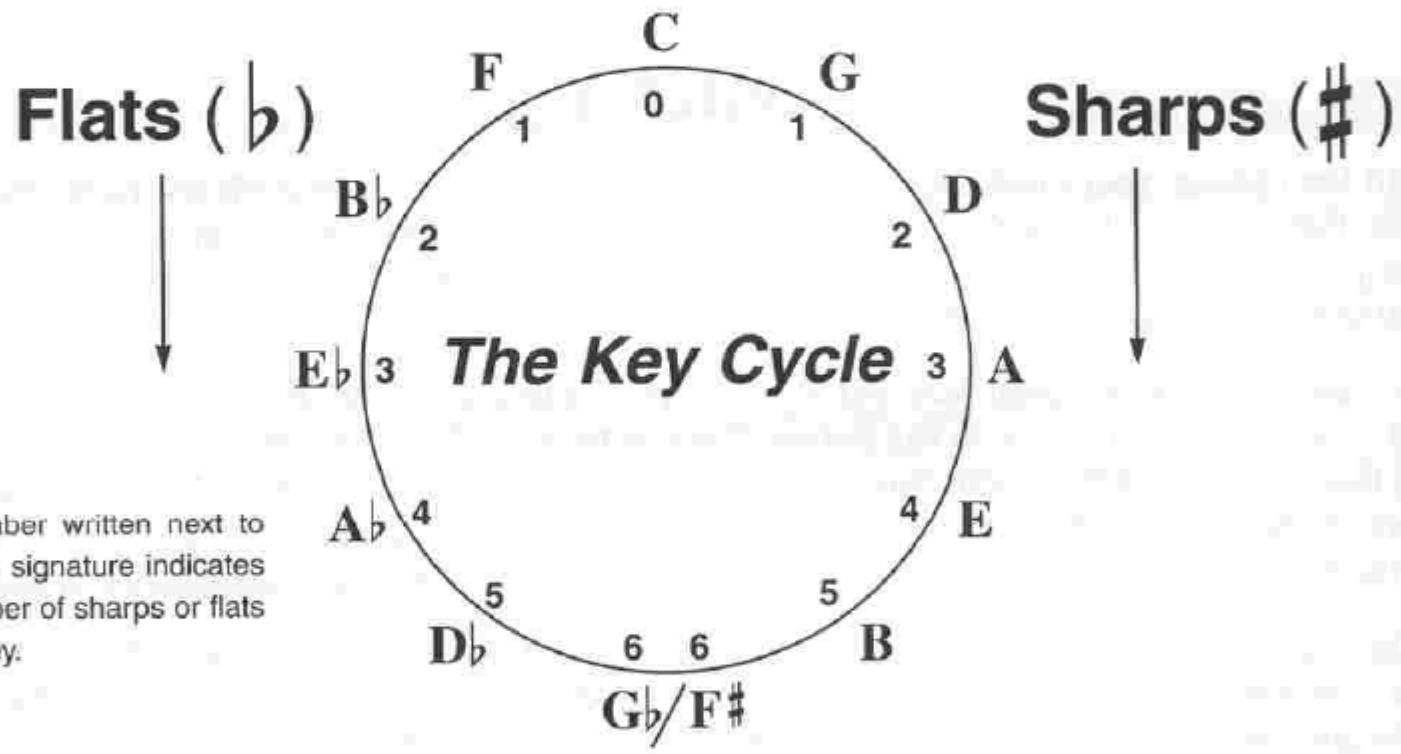
Chords I, IV and V in all Keys

KEY	I	IV	V	KEY	I	IV	V
C	C	F	G	F	F	B♭	C
G	G	C	D	B♭	B♭	E♭	F
D	D	G	A	E♭	E♭	A♭	B♭
A	A	D	E	A♭	A♭	D♭	E♭
E	E	A	B	D♭	D♭	G♭	A♭
B	B	E	F♯	G♭	G♭	C♭	D♭
F♯	F♯	B	C♯				

Learning the Keys

The term **"key"** describes the central note around which a piece of music is based, e.g. a piece of music in the key of **C** would derive its notes and chords from a **C major scale**, or scales such as C mixolydian, C Blues scale, etc. A piece of music in the key of **A** would derive its notes and chords from the **A major scale**, and so on. When you play with other musicians, you will find that eventually you need to know all the keys. **E** and **A** are fairly common keys for guitar, but if you are playing with a singer, you would have to play in whatever key suits their particular voice. That could be **F♯** or **D♭** for example. Piano players tend to like the keys of **C**, **F** and **G**, and horn players like flat keys such as **F**, **B♭** and **E♭**. So, you can see there are good reasons for understanding how keys work. This means you will eventually need quite a few different harmonicas. However, if you work with a particular musician or group regularly, you will find that they have a few favorite keys, so you won't necessarily need a harmonica in every key. Another important thing to remember is that you can play in more than one key on each harmonica by using first, second and third positions.

A good way to learn to play in all keys is to use the **key cycle** (also called the cycle of 5ths or cycle of 4ths). It contains the names of all the keys and is fairly easy to memorize.



***Note**
The number written next to each key signature indicates the number of sharps or flats in that key.

Think of the key cycle like a clock. Just as there are 12 points on the clock, there are also 12 keys. **C** is at the top and it contains no sharps or flats. Moving around clockwise you will find the next key is **G**, which contains one sharp (**F♯**). The next key is **D**, which contains two sharps (**F♯** and **C♯**). Progressing further through the sharp keys each key contains an extra sharp, with the new sharp being the 7th note of the new key, the other sharps being any which were contained in the previous key. Therefore the key of **A** would automatically contain **F♯** and **C♯** which were in the key of **D**, plus **G♯** which is the 7th note of the A major scale. As you progress around the cycle, each key introduces a new sharp. When you get to **F♯** (at 6 o'clock), the new sharp is called **E♯** which is enharmonically the same as **F**. **Enharmonic** means two different ways of writing the same note. Another example of enharmonic spelling would be **F♯** and **G♭**. This means that **G♭** could become the name of the key of **F♯**. The key of **F♯** contains six sharps, while the key of **G♭** contains six flats.

If you start at **C** again at the top of the cycle and go anti-clockwise you will progress through the flat keys. The key of **F** contains one flat (**B♭**), which then becomes the name of the next key around the cycle. In flat keys, the new flat is always the 4th degree of the new key. Continuing around the cycle, the key of **B♭** contains two flats (**B♭** and **E♭**) and so on.

Approach to Practice

Regardless of the style of music you play, It is important to have a correct approach to practice. You will benefit more from several short practices (e.g. 20-30 minutes per day) than one or two long sessions per week. This is especially so in the early stages, because of the basic nature of the material being studied and also because your lips and facial muscles are still developing. If you want to become a great player you will obviously have to practice more as time goes on, but it is still better to work on new things a bit at a time. Get one small piece of information and learn it well before going on to the next topic. Make sure each new thing you learn is thoroughly worked into your playing. This way you won't forget it, and you can build on everything you learn.

In a practice session you should divide your time evenly between the study of new material and the revision of past work. It is a common mistake for semi-advanced students to practice only the pieces they can already play well. Although this is more enjoyable, it is not a very satisfactory method of practice. You should also try to correct mistakes and experiment with new ideas. It is the author's belief that the guidance of an experienced teacher will be an invaluable aid in your progress. To develop a good time feel, it is essential that you always practice with a metronome (or drum machine). If you don't own one, go and buy one now and use it!

Listening

Apart from books, your most important source of information will be recordings. Listen to albums which feature harp players. Some important players to look out for are: Sonny Terry, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson, Junior Wells, Big Walter Horton, Billy Branch, Paul Butterfield, Snooky Pryor, Charlie Musselwhite and Rod Piazza.

There are also numerous great Jazz and Blues sax players who are worth checking out. Little Walter got a lot of his ideas from listening to sax players. Some of the most Bluesy sax players are: Maceo Parker and Pee Wee Ellis (Solo or with James Brown) King Curtis, Junior Walker, Fathead Newman, A.C. Reed, Eddie Shaw, Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson, Scott Page, Illinois Jacquet, Stanley Turrentine, Eddie Harris, Ben Webster, Johnny Hodges, and Roland Kirk who often played two saxophones at a time!

Guitar Players are another good source of ideas. listen to the guitarist on any Blues album and you will hear note bending, slides, grace notes and other techniques which are equally effective on the harmonica. Some guitarists to look out for are BB King, Otis Rush, Buddy Guy (with Junior Wells or solo), Magic Sam, Lightnin' Hopkins and Albert Collins along with Robert Junior Lockwood and Luther Tucker who can both be found on albums by Sonny Boy Williamson.

When you are listening to albums, try to sing along with the solos and visualize which holes you would play and the techniques you would use to achieve the sounds you are hearing. This helps you absorb the music and before long, it starts to come out in your own playing. It is also valuable to play along with albums, sometimes imitating what you are hearing and other times improvising. This is very good ear training and is also a lot of fun.

Amplification

When playing with a band, it is often necessary to amplify your harmonica. This can be done by using a harmonica microphone such as a Shure "green bullet" and plugging it into an amplifier (usually a guitar amplifier) or by playing directly into a vocal microphone through a PA system. It takes practice to play well with amplification, so if possible it is best to rehearse regularly with your amplified sound before playing live.

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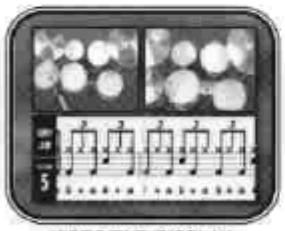

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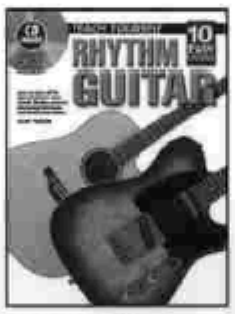

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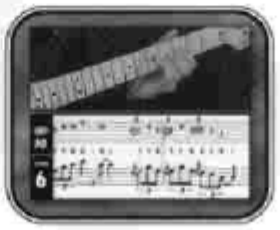

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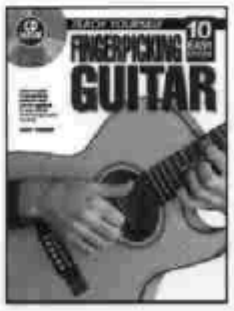

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